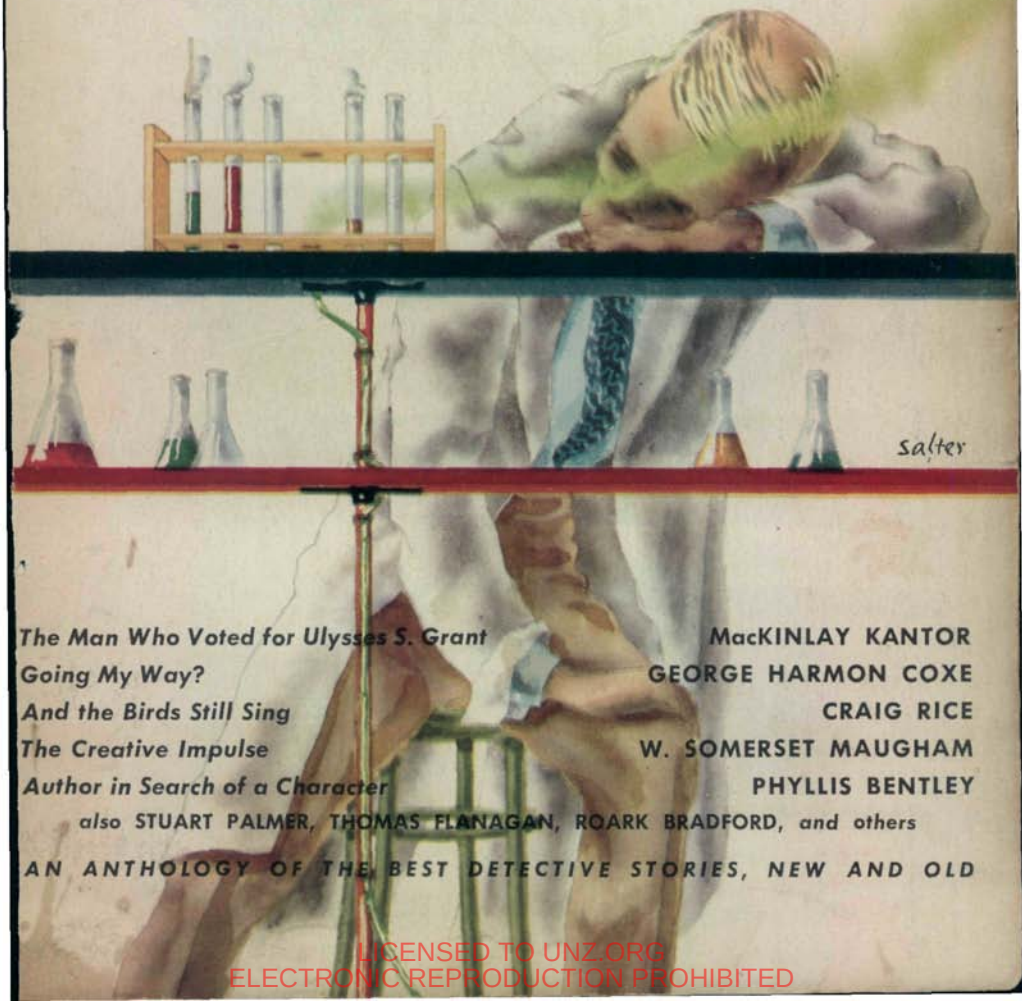
DECEMBER 35 Cents

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A MERCURY PUBLICATION



The Man Who Voted for Ulysses S. Grant — MacKINLAY KANTOR
Going My Way? — GEORGE HARMON COXE
And the Birds Still Sing — CRAIG RICE
The Creative Impulse — W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM
Author in Search of a Character — PHYLLIS BENTLEY

also STUART PALMER, THOMAS FLANAGAN, ROARK BRADFORD, and others

AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES, NEW AND OLD

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Book of WIT & HUMOR

I am pleased to announce the appearance of our seventh publication, THE BOOK OF WIT & HUMOR. *Edited by the celebrated poet, anthologist, humorist, and lecturer, Louis Untermeyer,* WIT & HUMOR *will aim to bring together the best of the old and the best of the new in its field. Most of its pages will be devoted to American literary products in every form — fiction, poetry, parody, epigram, drama — but there will also be works by authors* in partibus infidelium.* *So all embracing is the taste of our editors, that the pages of* WIT & HUMOR *will be open day and night, including all holidays, legal or otherwise, for contributions by all men and women, professional writers or otherwise, who have said something or have something to say that will bring forth a laugh or a smile.*

There will be nothing bitter or mean in the magazine, nothing vengeful, nothing sly or snide. WIT & HUMOR *aims only to make life a little easier — even if temporarily — in these days of flying saucers, political haranguing, and $1.25 haircuts (for men).*

We believe that most decent, well-informed, and well disposed men and women will find in the pages of WIT & HUMOR *a haven and a refuge. We cannot and we do not promise that all the pieces in* WIT & HUMOR *will give everyone a laugh — laughter is so personal a thing — but we can and we do promise that everyone will find several things in* WIT & HUMOR *that he or she will want to reread just for the fun of it.*

By the way, WIT & HUMOR *sells for only 35¢ a copy and can be obtained at all better newsstands.*

LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK, *Publisher*
MERCURY PUBLICATIONS

** For the benefit of graduates of Progressive schools, this Latin phrase, freely translated, means "in foreign lands."*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

DETECTIVE STORIES

Author in Search of a Character	*Phyllis Bentley*	3
And the Birds Still Sing	*Craig Rice*	33
The Inspector Had a Wife	*Charles B. Child*	55
The Jinx Man	*Stuart Palmer*	81
The Point of Honor	*Thomas Flanagan*	129

CRIME STORIES

Man Who Voted for Ulysses S. Grant	*MacKinlay Kantor*	12
Going My Way?	*George Harmon Coxe*	22
A Matter of Timing	*Victor Canning*	50
Mrs. Oliphant Deceased	*Michael Gilbert*	68

WESTERN DETECTIVE STORY

The Sheriff Decides	*Roark Bradford*	65

EQMM "FIRST"

Morte d'Alain	*Maxey Brooke*	74

OUT OF LEFT FIELD

The Creative Impulse	*W. Somerset Maugham*	101

BOOK REVIEWS

Detective Directory	*Robert P. Mills*	72
INDEX TO VOLUME NUMBER TWENTY		142

PUBLISHER: *Lawrence E. Spivak* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 20, No. 109, DEC. 1952. Published monthly by Mercury Publications, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U.S.A. and possessions, Canada and the Pan American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the post office at Concord, N. H. under the act of March 3, 1879,

Copyright, 1952, by Mercury Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the International Copyright Convention and the Pan-American Copyright Convention. Printed in U.S.A.

Robert P. Mills, *Managing Editor* Joseph W. Ferman, *General Manager*

George Salter, *Art Director*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Outstanding New Mystery Books

"The one indispensable anthology of the year."
—N. Y. TIMES

Queen's AWARDS

EDITED BY ELLERY QUEEN

With each successive volume *THE QUEEN'S AWARDS* gains in popularity—and reviewers agree that here is "a don't miss volume for mystery shorts enthusiasts." $2.75

JOHNNY AND SUZY MARSHALL land in between two rival gun mobs as they seek the solution to a sensational jewel robbery

A SHROUD FOR MR. BUNDY

The New John and Suzy Marshall Mystery

by JAMES M. FOX

At all bookstores • $2.75

LITTLE, BROWN & COMPANY
Boston 6, Mass.

DR. CARL JUNG

An ardent mystery fan

"When Jung [founder of analytical psychology] is not pondering the relation of modern man to his soul, he is apt to be found sailing a small ketch on the Lake of Zurich, or reading an endless chain of violent detective stories, sometimes at the rate of one a day." *

Dr. Jung, one of the most celebrated students of the human mind, thus joins the company of such leaders of world thought as Bertrand Russell, Ivor Brown, Harold U. Nicolson, and scores of others who find relaxation from the strain of this atomic age in the reading of detective stories.

IT'S SMART TO READ MYSTERIES
IT'S ALSO GOOD FOR YOUR PEACE OF MIND

**From TIME, July 7, 1952.*

TO A BOOK PUBLISHER:

Do you have trouble allocating the limited budget for your mystery books?

Then, use this page to help sell your mystery titles. The rate is low — only $77 per quarter-page unit; and the market is large and responsive.

The closing date for the February issue is December 3

EQMM

570 Lexington Avenue New York 22, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Phyllis Bentley is considered by many British critics to be the "greatest regional novelist of her day." Her most important books have Yorkshire backgrounds and characters, but their themes have a sociological significance which transcends all regional, or for that matter national, boundaries. That explains why her tales of Yorkshire have been widely translated, why they have brought Miss Bentley international popularity and acclaim.

After a full and successful career, Miss Bentley can still say that she has two overwhelming interests in life — "humanity, and the enrichment of human life by culture"; and she is especially eager that "the little unit of earth I call my native county shall be thus enriched."

Now, who would have thought that a regional novelist of such stature would have written an ingenious — indeed, a brilliant — short story of pure detection? Yes, "Author in Search of a Character" is in the classic 'tec tradition. Meet Miss Marian Phipps, spinster-novelist, who by her solo flight of deduction, has earned permanent membership in the Club of Armchair Criminologists.

AUTHOR IN SEARCH OF A CHARACTER

by PHYLLIS BENTLEY

IT WAS HALF-PAST 2 ON A WARM afternoon in autumn; the passengers in the northbound Pullman had lunched, wisely perhaps but certainly well, and were all ungracefully asleep in their corners, their open mouths and crimson faces cocked roofward at odd angles, like a bed of red dahlias turning to the sun. All, that is, except two persons who faced each other across a table at the far end of the coach. They were awake and indeed their eyes were particularly wide open, for each was staring glassily at a point just above the other's head. The table between them was strewn with writing materials, which, however, neither seemed inclined to use. That they were engaged in some mental travail seemed probable; with each mile the train rushed northward the woman's bushy white hair seemed to grow wilder, the young man's agreeable, plain face more haggard, the eyes of both more distraught.

Miss Marian Phipps, the novelist, was busy with a problem of characterization which had held up her work for the past three weeks. It concerned the heroine of her new novel, who

Copyright, 1937, by Crowell-Collier Publishing Co.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was just about to emerge from her brain onto the written page. The girl had stuck on the threshold so long because Miss Phipps was utterly unable to decide her appearance. It was necessary for the plot that the hero should feel for her, at first sight, a love equally tenacious, respectful, and adoring; now Miss Phipps could not decide what kind of girl, if any, nowadays could command from a contemporary such a passion. She would probably be dark, Miss Phipps had decided; but was she richly rosy, full of life, with flashing eyes, or pale, mysterious, slender? As fast as Miss Phipps pronounced for one type, she revoked the decision in favor of another.

On this, the twenty-second day of the struggle, she had as a last hope booked a seat in the Edinburgh express. She did not in the least wish to go to Edinburgh, but found long train journeys stimulating to the creative faculties. But already a considerable number of miles had gone by, and she was no nearer her solution; she felt hot, tired, cross, and in urgent need of an excuse for ceasing work.

The train took a sudden curve without slowing; Miss Phipps and the large young man found their feet and their papers mixed in consequence. With mutual loathing in their hearts they murmured apologies and disentangled their property. For the first time Miss Phipps observed the young man's notebook; always avid for human detail, she tried to read it upside down. "S-u-l-l-e-n," she spelled; "aged 35, sullen and vehement." At once her large mouth widened to a smile; her eyes beamed behind her old-fashioned pince-nez.

"You are a novelist too?" she exclaimed joyfully.

The young man gave her an unresponsive glare. He did not want to talk to Miss Phipps. He did not admire Miss Phipps. As an object of vision he found her definitely unpleasing. The round pink face, the untidy white hair, the too glowing smile, the bright blue jumper, the lopsided pince-nez moored by a chain to a kind of bollard on her substantial bosom — these clashed with his notions of female beauty; that she was a "lady novelist" as well was just, he thought, what might have been expected. "Only needs a Peke to be complete," he decided disgustedly.

"You are a novelist too?" repeated Miss Phipps, beaming.

"Certainly not," snapped the large young man.

"I beg your pardon," said Miss Phipps in an icy tone. "From a phrase in your notebook, which I confess I took a childish pleasure in deciphering from this angle, I surmised I might be addressing a fellow-craftsman."

The young man was rather startled. "More in the old girl than meets the eye," he thought. Coloring, he stammered apologies. "I was thinking of something else," he explained. "I'm a good deal worried just now by a serious problem."

Miss Phipps forgave him. "It's no crime not to be a novelist," she said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Rather the reverse, perhaps, nowadays. And whoever we are, we all have our problems."

There was a hint of question in her last sentence and the young man was caught by it. "I'm a detective," he blurted. "Detective-Sergeant Tarrant, of the Southshire police headquarters."

"Really!" cried Miss Phipps, impressed. "A detective! On a murder case, perhaps? Do tell me all about it. My name is Marian Phipps."

The young man gave a heavy sigh. "I'm afraid I haven't read any of your novels," he said gloomily.

Miss Phipps had a stock rejoinder for this remark; she always replied: "No? You prefer the lighter fiction?" and found it not ineffective. But this time, hot on a murder trail, she would forego her mild revenge. With one plump little hand she waved her novels out of court. "Do tell me about your problem," she urged. "It will clear your thoughts to put them into words. Besides, I might be able to help. Psychology, you know. Characterization. Do tell me. I'm not a very discreet person, I'm afraid; but I don't live anywhere near Southshire."

Detective-Sergeant Tarrant rumpled his hair and sighed again, but more hopefully.

"Will you promise not to write up the story if I tell you?" he inquired.

Miss Phipps considered. "I will promise," she said, "that I will not use the story for five years, and that when I do, it will be unrecognizable."

Tarrant laughed. "Now that's the sort of promise you can believe," he said heartily. "Well, I'll tell you. I'd be glad enough of any help; I don't mind admitting I'm stuck with it myself."

He sat up, flicked the pages of his notebook, and began in a brisk official tone:

"On Wednesday last, September 13, I was summoned at 1:30 A.M. by the local police to a house on the front in the seaside resort of Brittlesea; house called Lorel Manor, property of a financier named Ambrose Stacey. Large new house, standing in large grounds; newest architecture, modern luxury furnishings; marble swimming pool in rose garden. The call was received at the station at 1:20 A.M. from the butler, who stated that he had been awake in bed, reading, when he heard loud screams from Mrs. Stacey at approximately 1:15 A.M. He went down to investigate, found her in hysterics on the landing, and called the police."

"But who was dead?" demanded Miss Phipps impatiently.

"I went to Lorel Manor and found the whole household assembled on the upper landing," continued the detective with a repressive glance. "In their midst was lying Mr. Ambrose Stacey, dead. His neck was broken. It was plain that he had fallen down the short flight of stairs leading from his bedroom, a large octagonal apartment almost entirely surrounded by windows, to the main landing below."

"An accident!" exclaimed Miss Phipps, disappointed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"On the contrary," said Tarrant grimly. "A piece of strong string was found dangling from the rail of the chromium balustrade at the very top of the stairs. The end was broken; a similar piece of string with a broken end was found attached to the opposite balustrade; on measuring —"

"You needn't labor the point," said Miss Phipps. "The string was put there to be fallen over and he fell over it. Go on."

"Mr. and Mrs. Stacey had entered the house by means of Mr. Stacey's latchkey," continued the detective, consulting his notebook, "shortly after 1 o'clock. They had been dining — with a business friend of Mr. Stacey's. The butler heard them come in and go straight upstairs to their room. About 1:10 Mr. Stacey, desiring a whiskey and soda, found that the siphon was not in its usual place on the tray in his room; he went downstairs to find it, with fatal results."

"Ah," said Miss Phipps, "the siphon was not in its usual place."

"The problem is," said the detective: "who tied that string?"

"Who was in the house at the time?" demanded the novelist.

"Mrs. Eleanor Stacey, the second wife of the deceased; Rachel, his daughter by his first wife; Rachel's nursery governess, the butler, the cook, the housemaid, the parlormaid. Not, however, Mr. Stacey's secretary, Jack Thornhill."

"From your tone, Mr. Thornhill's absence seems to have a special significance?" queried Miss Phipps.

"His absence was perhaps rather fortunate for Mr. Thornhill," said the detective. "He has an alibi for the whole night, in Leeds; I'm going now to investigate it. It's only fair to say, however, that it has been investigated three times already. He was speaking at a birthday dinner in Leeds at half-past 9; I don't see what you can do against that. It's more than 200 miles from Leeds to Brittlesea."

"Mr. Thornhill is young and handsome, I take it?" said Miss Phipps, her voice warm with interest.

The detective nodded. "If you like that varnished type," he said.

"And Mrs. Stacey is also young and handsome?"

The detective nodded again emphatically.

"And Ambrose Stacey was neither young nor handsome?"

"He was 59," replied Tarrant considerингly, "but really I'm not so sure about the handsome. A very big powerful fellow, with penetrating blue eyes and thick graying hair which stands up from his head, if you know what I mean."

"*En brosse*," suggested Miss Phipps.

"Very likely," said the detective. "Mrs. Stacey is prostrate with grief; you'd certainly think she was devoted to him. She is really very beautiful, you know; young and fair and gentle. Early twenties."

"Poor before she married?" inquired Miss Phipps.

"Yes. Poor and county. Expensive tastes, I daresay. And she gets a pretty

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fair amount of cash by the will," said Tarrant. "*And* young Thornhill dotes on her. From appearances you'd judge she loved her husband. But plainly she's the first to be suspected." He sighed.

Miss Phipps gave him a shrewd look. "Was the deceased financier what for the sake of brevity we call a gentleman?" she asked.

"Lord, no!" replied the detective more cheerfully. "No more a gentleman than I am."

Miss Phipps surveyed him with approval. "Tell me more," she said.

"Stacey was a thorough rascal, but a dashed interesting chap," went on Tarrant. "Ambrose Stacey wasn't his real name."

"I thought it sounded a little pseudo," said the novelist.

"Oh, you did?" said the detective, glancing at her respectfully. "Well, he had one of those obscure middle-European names, you know, which may mean anything. He'd been everywhere and done everything, and collected a lot of cash in rather odd ways, and I expect also made a lot of enemies. It may be one of them who's bumped him off; that's the trouble, from my point of view. He married his first wife when he was poor, in the middle-European days, and she never quite fitted into his new setting. He was apt to find consolation elsewhere for that, if you understand me; but at any rate he must have been a decent father, for his daughter Rachel simply adores him. The first Mrs. Stacey died seven years ago, and he remained faithful to her memory, outwardly at least, till he married Eleanor. That was just the early spring of this year."

"And Rachel?" said Miss Phipps thoughtfully. "The daughter?"

"Well, of course I thought of her at once," said the detective. "She's twelve years old and the door of her room is just at the foot of the fatal stairs; and string tied to bannisters — it sounds like a child's practical joke."

"A curious set of circumstances, if so," commented Miss Phipps. "A child chances to seize the only possible five minutes when the joke could bring disaster. For in the morning Mr. and Mrs. Stacey would presumably be called by a maid with tea, going *up* the stairs."

"Don't let that worry you," said the detective grimly, "for it wasn't a practical joke. The small landing outside the Staceys' room is lighted by a wall lamp which turns on by a switch at the bedroom door. The bulb had been removed from it."

"Tchk!" exclaimed Miss Phipps. "How shocking!"

"The bulb was lying at the foot of the lamp, intact; therefore it had not fallen but been placed there. Nobody admits removing it," concluded the detective.

"Worse and worse," said Miss Phipps distressfully. "And the child? Rachel?"

"She's a pretty little thing, but delicate; thin and pale and as nervy as you make 'em," replied Tarrant. "Of course, I've only seen her in trouble,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you may say; she was in despair about her father. But everyone tells me what a nervy delicate child she is; why, Mrs. Stacey had moved her to her present bedroom from a more distant one, so as to be able to hear her if she woke and cried in the night. At twelve years old, you know. Yes, poor kid; she's clever but nervy."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Miss Phipps, twitching her bushy eyebrows mournfully. "I'm very unhappy about this case, very."

"Why?" said the detective.

"Aren't you?" demanded Miss Phipps, looking at him shrewdly.

"Yes. But I don't see how she could have done it," said Tarrant. "Five past 1, light there, no string; ten past 1, string there, no light. How could she suddenly leave the bedroom and begin to fidget on her hands and knees just outside the door? What could she say if her husband looked out to see what she was doing? Why didn't she remove the string and replace the light before screaming to the butler?"

"Oh," said Miss Phipps, "you're thinking of Mrs. Stacey."

"Of course. Aren't you?"

"Never mind. Go on," said Miss Phipps firmly. "What steps did you take to solve the mystery?"

"I looked," said Tarrant, "first for the bulb and then for the siphon."

"Very proper," said Miss Phipps nodding. "A good point. You looked for the siphon. And where did you find it?"

"In young Thornhill's room," said Tarrant. "That's why I'm investigating his alibi for the third time. He says, however, that Stacey came into his room that morning as he was packing his case for his journey to Leeds, to have a last word with him; Stacey wanted a drink, pulled out his flask, and sent Thornhill for the nearest siphon, which of course was the one in his bedroom. A silly story, but in view of Stacey's habits it may be true. Thornhill says that as he returned, siphon in hand, he met Rachel going to her bedroom, and Rachel corroborates this, time and place."

"Oh, I'm delighted to hear it!" cried Miss Phipps with joy. "It's a very great relief to me indeed; I'm simply delighted to hear it."

"But why?" demanded Tarrant in some exasperation. "That doesn't clear young Thornhill of removing the siphon on his own, for a murderous motive."

"I never thought it did," said Miss Phipps. "But he has an alibi. Oh, I am so delighted to hear it, so delighted!"

"What do you see in this case that I don't, I wonder?" said the detective thoughtfully.

"My dear boy," said Miss Phipps firmly, "you said yourself that the method sounded childish. Rachel had the best opportunity of placing the string — better than anyone else in the house; her door is just at the foot of the stairs; you said so."

"But it wasn't a practical joke, because of the light," objected Tarrant.

"Exactly. The fall was quite pre-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

meditated," said Miss Phipps, "quite intended. But might it not," said Miss Phipps sadly, "might it not have been premeditated by Rachel?"

"You mean she meant to murder her father?" cried Tarrant. He paused to consider. "Good God!" He struck the table with his hand. "She knew about the siphon!"

"To my mind," observed Miss Phipps calmly, "that's just what clears her of the suspicion of murder and that's why I was so delighted to hear of it."

"Miss Marian Phipps," said the detective, "you're a very exasperating woman.

"My dear boy," observed Miss Phipps very earnestly, "I beg you not to take my criticism unkindly. But, if you will allow me to say so, you're making a great mistake. You're paying too much attention to the mechanics of your plot — bulbs and strings and siphons — and neglecting your human element, your characterization. Why should Rachel murder her father?"

"She had no reason on earth," said the detective. "She adored him."

"Exactly," said Miss Phipps. "Then dismiss that idea altogether from your mind and consider the facts you have laid before me. Don't you see what they all point to? The origin of the tragedy remains as yet obscure to me, because your sketch of the characters is so lamentably imperfect. But one fact emerges clearly. Don't you see that *the wrong person tripped over that string*?"

"What?" shouted Tarrant; his voice was so loud that several of the dahlias stirred and nodded. "How do you reach such a preposterous conclusion?"

"But you told me yourself," objected Miss Phipps mildly, "Mrs. Stacey moved Rachel's bedroom so that she could hear the child if she cried in the night. What do you do when you hear a child cry in the night? You hurry to soothe her. Who, then, often ran down those stairs in the night? Eleanor Stacey. Who knew that fact? Everyone in the household, including Rachel. So much is established fact. I then went one step further and said: What do highly-strung children often feel toward their stepmothers?"

"You mean Rachel meant to murder Mrs. Stacey out of jealousy? Good God! And she's such a nice little kid; I was so sorry for her. How horrible!"

"That's what I thought," said Miss Phipps sweetly. "But don't you see, the siphon clears her. She adored her father. She knew that he might come down to fetch the missing siphon. Would she, then, place the string there just that night? No; for to do so was to risk her father's life, and there were many other nights. Therefore Rachel did not place the string that night. But the string was placed that night. Therefore we must look elsewhere for the murderer — and how gladly," said Miss Phipps, beaming, "we do so."

"Rachel's only a child; she mightn't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have worked all that out about the siphon; she might have forgotten all about the siphon," said Tarrant in a tone of gloom.

"In that case the siphon has no significance at all," snapped Miss Phipps. "For I refuse to believe that either young Thornhill or Eleanor would risk a method of killing Ambrose so dangerous to Eleanor; while if Eleanor was to be killed, the siphon had no part to play. We are just where we were before."

At this moment the train burst through a series of bridges with a lamentable clatter; the passengers, startled awake, tossed up and down as they took down hats and picked up handbags; evidently the train was approaching some station.

"We're much worse than we were before," shouted Tarrant above the din. "I had one clue, and at least the identity of the victim was clear, but now you've thrown away the siphon and confused even the object of the crime. If Eleanor Stacey was the intended victim, an entirely fresh set of motives must be found. I wish —"

"You wish I'd never spoken to you," said Miss Phipps regretfully. "That I can well understand. I really don't know," she added with a sigh, "how I came to commit such an impropriety —"

The detective colored and protested.

"— as to interrupt someone else's cerebration," concluded Miss Phipps firmly. "It was unpardonable and I offer you my sincerest apologies. How did I come to do such a thing? Good gracious!" she exclaimed. "I remember now! Mr. Tarrant! You've been deceiving me! You have omitted from your account of this tragedy one of the characters."

"I don't think so," said the detective, hesitating. "The servants had only been there since the marriage this spring. I don't think so."

"But I'm sure," insisted Miss Phipps. "Positive! Listen. Ambrose Stacey, aged 59. Eleanor his wife, fair and gentle, in her twenties. Rachel, child, aged twelve. Jack Thornhill, in his twenties. Then who was sullen and vehement and in the 30's?"

The detective stared.

"I read it in your notebook," cried Miss Phipps, pointing impatiently. "Who was aged 35, sullen and vehement?"

Tarrant, startled, flipped the pages. "That was Rosa Dorlan, Rachel's nursery governess," he discovered.

"How long had she been with the Staceys?" cried Miss Phipps eagerly.

"Seven years," said Tarrant.

The station, an animated scene with porters, passengers, newsboys, and buffet attendants darting hither and thither like gnats above a flower bed, burst upon them.

"Then there you are!" cried Miss Phipps hastily in triumph. "Don't you see? Don't you see her? Rosa. Handsome. Dark. Ripe. Flushed cheeks. Vehement. Sullen. Involved with Stacey. Hopes to be his wife. The new wife comes. Finds child

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

neurotic and unhappy. Dissatisfied with Rosa. Keeps child near her night and day. Often comes down in night to see her. Nurse knows this. String. Wife trips. End of wife. Nurse not lose job. Indispensable again to Stacey. Perhaps his wife. Siphon a chance, an accident. Wrong person killed. Great distress of Rosa. So great, she forgot to replace bulb and remove string. How's that?"

"So good," said Detective-Sergeant Tarrant, standing up and reaching for his hat, "that I shall get out at this station and go straight back to Brittlesea. It will make so much difference to — er, to all concerned, to have their innocence clearly established." He pulled out an official card and offered it to her respectfully. "If you have any ideas on any future murder problems, Miss Phipps," he said, "I wish you would drop me a line about them. Meanwhile, if there is anything I can do —"

"You've done it," sighed Miss Phipps happily, snatching her pencil and writing: "Fair, young, gentle."

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233)
SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION

of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, published monthly at Concord, New Hampshire for October 1, 1952

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publisher*, Lawrence E. Spivak, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22; *Editor*, Ellery Queen, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22; *Managing Editor*, Robert P. Mills, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22; and *General Manager*, Joseph W. Ferman, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22. 2. The owners are: Mercury Publications, Inc., 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22; Lawrence E. Spivak, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22; and Joseph W. Ferman, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22. 3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None. 4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. (Signed) Joseph W. Ferman, General Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 17th day of September, 1952. [Seal] Howard K. Pruyn, *Notary Public*. (My commission expires March 30, 1953.)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A touching and deeply sympathetic story about Election Day in a mid-western American city, and the part played by Ephraim Arlington, who voted for Ulysses S. Grant 'way back in '68 . . . by the author of LONG REMEMBER, *one of the finest novels about the Civil War, and* THE VOICE OF BUGLE ANN *and that wonderful motion picture, "The Best Years of Our Lives."*

BOY FRIEND:

The Man Who Voted for Ulysses S. Grant

by MacKINLAY KANTOR

IRMA MALANTI AND ED WELWITZ met early in the morning and breakfasted together at Harrison's Orange Hut, at the corner of Tetley Street and West Avenue. Both had slept later than they planned, and it was necessary for them to hurry, so their breakfast was a sketchy proceeding — only a glass of orange juice apiece and a couple of sandwiches.

"What'll Costarsen say if we're late?" asked Irma, sliding down from the wicker-backed stool.

Ed wiped his mouth with a paper napkin and followed her to the sidewalk.

"It ain't what he'll say. It's what he might do. He might lose us our jobs for today, maybe."

They hurried down Tetley Street and turned west on Chippewa Place. Here the buildings were old, shabby-windowed relics of a Gold Coast that had died long before, leaving a new generation to seep in and make goulash in the very kitchens which once had been scented with the spices of aristocracy.

Half a block west on Chippewa Place stood an apartment building, barren and crude, built of yellow brick. It was only three or four years old, but the dismal neighborhood had already tainted it with a cheap mustiness. At an arched doorway which led to a tradesmen's alley along the side, beneath a row of rear porches, stood a fat, bald-headed man who was nailing up a small cotton flag.

"Hello, young folks!"

"H'lo!" responded Irma, smiling bashfully.

Mr. Hoopstein was rich. He owned a lot of buildings in that neighborhood, and rich people always made Irma rather frightened. She had a vague idea that they could suddenly turn around and buy a person out, body and soul.

Ed wasn't at all bashful. He didn't

Copyright, 1929, by Frank A. Munsey Company

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

care how rich Mr. Hoopstein was.

"Say, Mr. Hoopstein, there was a lot of talk along the street last night about Bellarno's crowd coming in here today and cleaning us out. What do you think about it?"

Hoopstein drove a last tack through the thin staff of the little flag and turned toward Welwitz, brandishing his hammer.

"What do I think? Just what anybody else would think. Let 'em try anything — that's all! We're going to have a policeman on duty here, and if any roughneck like Tony Bellarno thinks he's bossing things in this precinct, he'll find himself in the hoosegow pretty damn quick!"

"Well!" Ed shrugged his shoulders. He didn't have so much faith in the police. "All I can say is that if anything happens, I'll prob'ly wish I had stayed at work today instead of coming over here to get myself knocked off."

"Knocked off!" the fat man chuckled. "Bunk! Say, Cos is looking for you — for you too, girlie. I think he's inside."

They left Hoopstein nailing up the official card of the polling place, and went on through the dusky passageway under the porches. Ahead of them a yellow light bulb gleamed in the dark. It seemed as if night was reluctant to lift from the shady nooks between those buildings.

The second precinct was using the same polling place that it had used for the last two years — a damp laundry in the basement of the apartment building. Three rough tables were placed in a row near the west side of the room, and the voting booths were arranged along the wall to the right and in front of them.

Costarsen, the precinct captain, was very busy with envelopes stuffed full of papers. He was a short, heavy man of 30, with hard gray eyes and a quirking, humorous mouth.

"Ha-ya, Ed! Morning, Miss Malanti!" He moved a hasty finger toward the bill of his cap. "Say, where's everybody else?"

"We haven't seen anybody but Mr. Hoopstein," Irma said. She liked Costarsen, but not as well as she liked Ed, who had been her friend for more than a year.

"Who else is working, Cos?" Ed asked.

The precinct captain was thumbing through a sheaf of papers in his hand.

"You're a watcher; so's Marty Fishbeck. Mrs. Armitt and Miss Malanti are clerks. Hoopstein's one judge and George McCann is the other."

"What's Hoopstein — Democrat or Republican?"

Costarsen favored him with a sly glance.

"Don't be so dumb, Ed! How much difference do you think it makes, anyhow? McCann's with us, too — don't forget that. This is a Padget precinct, sound and solid."

Ed went over to the wall and found a nail where Irma could hang her coat.

"Yeah, but I heard a lot of talk last night."

"About Frankie Marr?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Sure! Everybody's saying that if things start going heavy for Padget, Tony Bellarno's going to come in here and knock hell out of us."

"Who said that!" demanded Cos aggrievedly. "Just tell me who said that!"

Ed shook his head and grinned.

"Oh, you know — a lot of talk, over at the cigar store and up at the corner."

"Well, Eddie, old kid," said Costarsen, patting the pit under his left arm, "if that dirty crook tries to hand *me* anything — well! Anyway, the bulls are going to be hanging around here all day, and maybe a dick from the bureau. This town isn't going to stand for any more foolishness."

Welwitz felt more secure. Having Hoopstein reassure him didn't mean a thing, but Costarsen was a big guy. People said he would be ward committeeman one of these days. He worked hard. He bossed the precinct with a firm hand, and delivered it over to his masters each November.

Other election workers began to come in. The first was Mrs. Armitt, who ran a boarding house over on Dearborn Street. She was a fat, rustling woman with beady black eyes and dyed hair. Then came George McCann, the garage man from Tetley Street, lean, red-eyebrowed, with rims of black under his thumbnails. The next was Marty Fishbeck, a war veteran with an artificial foot. This collection of peers would maneuver the ship of the second precinct through the stormy currents of the day.

They swore one another in, amid giggles and cigarette smoke. Early voters were already lining up inside the door, impatient and hurried. They took their ballots and disappeared behind gray curtains. Voting had begun.

"Hey, there ain't any pencil in this booth!"

"What's that name? Karveth? It ain't on the books. No, sir! C, is it? Spelled with a C? Just a minute —"

Ed Welwitz and Marty Fishbeck sat side by side with their printed lists, on which they checked the names of voters as they appeared. Irma Malanti sat at the table beside Mrs. Armitt, two wide red books open before them.

Occasionally, as the early rush slackened, Irma smiled at Ed. This was fun. It was her second election experience, and she had also served on registration day. It was fun to stay away from work, and to know that you would earn $20, even if you would have to be up most of the night counting votes. It was adventurous to go out to breakfast with Ed before 6 o'clock in the morning. Irma was glad that they knew Costarsen, who had got them their jobs.

Suddenly Mr. Costarsen appeared, from the street, where he had been superintending the distribution of campaign literature. He looked somewhat pale, and he pushed his cap back over his smooth hair with a startled gesture.

"Say, people, what do you know? Jim Banchi is dead."

There came vague responses —

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No!" — "What the hell?" — or merely, "Oh!"

"Who killed him?" demanded Hoopstein.

"Cops."

That was a sensation. If he had said that it was one of Frank Sapone's men, or even Tony Bellarno —

"What do you mean, cops?"

"Yes, sir — the police took him for a ride." Costarsen's eyes were protruding with excitement. They made you wonder if he didn't have a goiter, they looked so bulbous. "A squad car was going down the street about an hour ago. They picked up Banchi along with Looey Groat, that owns the Rouge Mount cabaret. They were driving down to the bureau, and Dave Hoyle shot him when they came to Wacker Drive. Dave said Banchi tried to grab his gun away from him. A cop is coming in here now; he just told me about it."

They all watched in silence as the officer strode in and took his station behind the table. He was a big, leather-faced man with flat lips and an undershot jaw. He stood against the wall, put his hands on his hips, and eyed the group slowly.

"Now listen here, folks." His voice was a thunderous drawl. "I don't know whether any of you are worried or scairt, but you don't have to be. I'll be on duty here all day, and tonight another officer will relieve me. Just because someone from this ward tried to get hard, and got himself bumped off, is no reason why things can't go according to law in this precinck. If anybody tries to get smart, just tell me about it!"

He waggled his head in affirmation before he lit a cigarette.

The election officials and watchers subsided into a whispering, docile choir. Irma glanced toward Ed; her eyes were wet with fright. Ed winked back, trying to grin unconcernedly; but no one was pleased with the prospect.

Jim Banchi had been known as the right-hand man of Tony Bellarno, northside gangster. Bellarno and his forces were unreservedly espousing the cause of Frankie Marr, a political henchman who was candidate for assessor. That Padget, the incumbent and opponent of Marr, had been instrumental in securing the demise of Banchi, would be gospel to the Bellarno gang. Already they had threatened to clean up the whole ward; and now —

"Nobody needs to worry." That was Costarsen, painfully hearty. He was like a small boy whistling past a graveyard. "You heard what Hagan just said; and I'll be right outside if anybody wants to see me."

He went out through the shadowy court, assuming his independent swagger as he walked.

If it were possible, the workers slid closer together in their chairs. They were working for their government; but savage forces were sniffing outside.

Ed made a number of errors as he checked his list of qualified voters. Cold perspiration stood out on Marty

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED.

Fishbeck's forehead, although that may have come from physical weakness. Irma and Mrs. Armitt conversed about beauty shops; their voices were sober and tinged with dread. Hoopstein and McCann strolled back and forth from windows to laundry tubs, handing out ballots, ushering citizens toward the booths, knocking ashes from their cigars with a confident ease which they did not feel. The policeman stood against the rear wall, his legs crossed and his gun dangling in sight.

Several of the voters were nervous, and spoiled their ballots.

Along toward 9 o'clock a stray sunbeam, which had found its way into the Chippewa Arms by some devious means, straggled across the torn quilt on Ephraim Arlington's bed and burned a gilded streak over the old man's eyelids. He blinked a rusty blink which must have made the worn hinges of his old skin creak. Then he sat up in bed, the soiled covers falling away from his yellowed nightshirt.

This was Election Day — and he had overslept!

His hand, bony and covered with sparse gray hairs, went wandering out for the thick watch that lay on a chair beside the iron bed. He squinted fiercely at its chipped face. Eight fifty-three, it said.

"One of these here times I'll just sleep on an' on, with no awakenin'. Maybe I'll sleep till afternoon," the old man thought vaguely, with no trace of gloom.

How many times had he voted? He voted first for Ulysses S. Grant in 1868. Well, that made — he rehearsed it in his ancient mind, ready to inform the first casual listener whom he met:

"I have voted today in my sixteenth Presidential election. First time I voted it was for Ulysses S. Grant, 'way back in '68. Sometimes I vote Republican an' sometimes Democratic. I always figger out just which man shall have my vote; don't allow no dictation by parties."

When you are 83 years old, like Ephraim Arlington, and live in a third-floor rear bedroom at the Chippewa Arms, and have no other person in the whole wide world to worry about except yourself, you don't care a great deal about breakfast. Ephraim cared more about getting dressed than about breakfast. He boasted a baggy suit of black broadcloth that had turned green around the cuffs and lapels. He was fond of that suit. He had worn it a long time, not solely because he was fond of it, but also because it was the only suit he had.

His meal was almost as hurried as the snack that Ed and Irma had taken three hours earlier. It consisted of a banana, a pint bottle of milk, which stood outside on the window sill, and two buns. It was enough for an old man, or anybody else in the second precinct.

As he replaced the almost empty bottle on the sill, Ephraim had an opportunity to look over the voters who

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were patronizing the polling place directly beneath him. He watched them for a few moments, stringing mistily through the dull court, half hidden by overhanging fire escapes and stairways; but when they entered the door of the laundry room they were opposite him, and he had an unobstructed view.

"Pretty light vote this early," he decided; "but it's going to be mighty heavy afore the day's over."

He found his pipe on the littered dresser and put it in his pocket. The watery mirror showed a distorted reflection as he passed — a slight, bearded human relic with a wide felt hat and a stained overcoat; a frail body bent double between two canes.

Ephraim went downstairs as seldom as possible, for it was difficult to go downstairs. There were two long flights, and a high flight of steps in front of the house. He held his canes gripped tight in his scrawny right hand and clutched the balustrade with his left, letting his body over each step with a sigh.

The Chippewa Arms was not the most stylish house on Chippewa Place. It had been a fine mansion once, long before old Arlington came there from Galena to live with his widowed daughter; but now its halls were carpeted with dingy green matting, and its front steps were covered with broken toys of children who had no other place to play. A faded sign announcing *Rooms by Day, Week or Month* established the fact that this was a cheap lodging house.

There was a pleasant bustle in the street this morning. Such days always made Ephraim think of celebrations and political campaigns back in Galena — of Colonel Kittoe, bearded and professional; of Rowley, sitting smoking in his office; and of the crowds of miners and townspeople shoving up and down the sidewalk — of old days and old ways.

Yes, Chippewa Place had a pleasant bustle this morning, but different from the old man's memories. A squalling calliope, roosting on the rear of a bunting-draped Ford truck, was spitting out the symphonic strains of *Big Bill, the Builder*, as it moved along the street. People with foreign faces and weird, slangy utterances thrust bits of cardboard and sample ballots into Ephraim's hands as he came slowly nearer the polls.

"Hello, dad! Gonna vote today?"

"Here y' are, Santy Claus! Personal card from James J. Padget!"

"Santy Claus, huh? What d'ye mean, Santy Claus? That's ole Trader Horn, that the story was about in the *Herald-Examiner*!"

These witticisms were received with coarse laughter. Ephraim Arlington couldn't quite understand what it was all about. Elections were so different nowadays. He stopped one man — an overdressed young giant with a dark face.

"First time I ever voted, in '68, it was for my fellow citizen of Galeny — Ulysses S. Grant —"

"Be yourself, old boy!"

The youth patted him on the arm.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Arlington wished that people would let him go on and tell the story — how Grant looked; and how, after the war, when he came back to Galena, the town rose up to shout:

"General, the sidewalk is built!"

Ephraim edged down three dark steps and into the areaway that led toward the polls. Here things were quieter. They didn't allow electioneering so close to the voting place. Several people, hurrying out, almost upset him as he tottered between his canes.

After he had reached the door, and stood inside it, he paused to look carefully around the room. Yes, this was the place — a laundry. He had voted there before.

"G'morning," he addressed the group behind the tables.

Several of them grinned back at him. Friendly people, they seemed. A fat man, whose face looked familiar, came over to him.

"Hello there, old gent! How's tricks?"

Oh, yes — this was Mr. Hoopstein, who owned the building in which Ephraim lived.

The old man's musing still clung to him.

"In Galeny, Illinois, the first vote I ever cast was for General Ulysses S. Grant. That was in 1868."

He surveyed them mutely, waiting for approbation. They all smiled, and seemed eager to hear more; but Hoopstein offered him a ballot, and put an arm about his shoulders, escorting him to the booth.

"This old guy's all right," Hoopstein told the election officials. "Name's Arlington — lives next door."

Irma Malanti found the name on the registration record.

"Yes, here it is — Ephraim P. Arlington, 1019 Chippewa Place."

The old man took a long time to mark his ballot. He worked slowly, painfully, with a pair of silver-rimmed glasses squeezed down over his nose.

"Took you quite a while, grandpa," Hoopstein joked as he came out.

Ephraim removed his glasses and slipped them into his pocket with a hand that trembled from so much excitement.

"Sort of hard, with so many foreign names. I can't get used to 'em, somehow."

Everybody laughed, as if the old man were a vaudeville entertainer. Even the policeman against the wall let his mouth relax into a grin.

Arlington's eyes traveled slowly over the officials. Most of them were foreigners, too; but that girl —

He thought she was one of the nicest-looking girls he had ever seen, with her black eyes and black hair, not too much paint on her face, and businesslike little hands.

"What's your name, miss?" he asked.

"Why, you old flirt!" interjected Mrs. Armitt; but Irma smiled at him, her eyes flashing.

"Irma Malanti," she told him simply.

Ephraim considered a while, study-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing her face. All these foreigners couldn't be so bad, then!

"I guess that's an Eyetalian name, ain't it? But you're a mighty pretty girl. My little girl Florence has hair like yours — no, she's been dead a long time."

This was a very nice old man, Irma thought.

"You're an old soldier, aren't you?" she inquired.

"I was with the Thirty-second Ioway," said Ephraim; "but I come back to Galeny after the war. I live up there now." He limped over to the dusty window and pointed up toward the moldy wall of the Chippewa Arms. "I can sit there by my window all day an' watch folks votin' down here. Of course, some say that Grant shouldn't 'a' tried to run for a third term, but folks in Galeny always knowed that he didn't really want it. He was just as glad when he didn't get it."

Other voters came in, and the election officials busied themselves with their records. Obviously Ephraim was in the way. He shuffled to the door, but turned and waved at Irma Malanti as he went out, and she waved back.

Outside, they didn't pester him with cards any more. There weren't so many people in the street. A few were watching a large car that was parked near the opposite curb. A squad car went past, filled with officers, and all of them were looking back. Old Arlington wasn't much interested in cars.

That pretty girl was like his daughter Florence — only Florence had hazel eyes.

He bought a few apples, another pint bottle of milk, and two slices of boiled ham. Someone had abandoned a morning paper on the steps in front of the Chippewa Arms, and the old man put it in his pocket as he came back from the store. Now, to climb those stairs — very high steps, and very many of them.

After he was in his room he had to sit quietly on the edge of the bed. Things pounded whenever he got excited, as if his whole body were beating internally.

When he had rested a while, he drew his chair near the window, where he could watch the voters. It was strange to see women going to vote. He couldn't get used to it. Women and men were going in and out there below his window. Presently he fell asleep.

Knock!

A loud thump on his door woke him up with a jerk. He rubbed his eyes and turned toward the door, calling:

"Come in!"

She came in quickly and slammed the door behind her. It was a lady, a young lady, a pretty girl. Why, it was the girl from the polling place!

"Hello there, miss! I — I was asleep."

What brought her here to old Ephraim's room? Nobody ever came to call on him. She had one hand hidden under her coat, and her face seemed whiter than he remembered it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Can you handle a gun?" she asked.

Could he? Why, he was a soldier — of course he could!

"Listen!" She was beside his chair, frenzied, pleading. "There's going to be trouble. Bellarno's men are going to shoot us up. Hoopstein was tipped off that they were coming. He's sent for cops, but there's a riot over in the Twentieth Ward, and maybe he can't get them in time. So I went for my brother's gun — and you can help."

Her hand jerked out from beneath her coat, and the old man saw that she had a big automatic pistol in it.

"You — you mean somebody's goin' to interfere with the votin'?"

Dimly the old man began to understand. Some hoodlums were going to annoy the election officials — hold them up, maybe. The police couldn't be found, and this girl had gone home for her brother's pistol. She was giving it to *him*, Corporal Ephraim Arlington, of the Thirty-second Infantry!

She raced to the door.

"I've got to go back. Ed Welwitz is still down there — he won't leave. They sent Mrs. Armitt and me away, but — you watch, daddy!"

She was gone, speeding nervously down the stairway, leaving the door slam shut behind her. For a moment Ephraim sat like a piece of old bronze. His heart was pumping insanely. Then he strained to his feet, drawing the chair up against the window sill.

He had the strange implement in his hand. His face was like sealing wax, but perspiration oozed from every pore of it. He stared down at the dark court, where the concrete blocks quivered in a crazy, reddish haze.

Bellarno's men were clever. They began their attack by having someone go down the alley and fire a clip of cartridges into the air.

The polling place wavered with jumping, hurried figures as the first shots went echoing between the buildings. Hagan, the officer, stumbled through the door and galloped toward the alley, drawing his gun as he ran. Marty Fishbeck and Ed Welwitz scrambled over the table in an obstacle race for the court, but McCann, more prudent, started for the ballot box. He had some vague notion of secreting it under the table.

"All right, you!" somebody yelled from the doorway.

Three men were there. Two of them held pistols pointed menacingly toward the frightened group in front of the booths. The third man, a slight, slick-haired youth in a checkered suit, had a strange object in his hands, with his fingers clutching a pair of notched finger grips below the barrel.

Bellarno himself was there, fearing neither courts nor God. Hoopstein's round face materialized before him, but the Italian floored the fat little man with a crashing blow.

"We want that box, Hoopstein. There's too much Padget around here!"

McCann felt the handles torn from his fingers. He saw the men pressing backward through the door; he heard Ed Welwitz sighing:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The dirty crook! If I had a gun —"

Just then Ephraim Arlington leaned through his open window and his pistol went *slam, slam, slam.* Bellarno stood stock-still outside the door. His eyes rolled back, and one hand went gropingly toward his neck. Then he slipped toward the ground in a quick squat, spinning forward on his face. The ballot box rolled free.

One other man got as far as the nearest archway, but stumbled as the others fled on toward the street. He rolled over on his back.

In the alley Hagan had time to shoot only once. His bullet struck a railing and flew upward in a whining ricochet . . . and through an open window.

"Get those guys! Get 'em!"

A police car was coming down Chippewa Place, its siren squealing.

"I never done it, I never done it!" Hagan was yelling excitedly to some one. "By the Lord, sergeant, I was clear down the alley then. It must 'a' been some of Nucci's gang around here!"

Irma and Ed went out to eat at six o'clock. Marty Fishbeck would take care of Ed's list while he was gone, and Mrs. Armitt would watch Irma's book.

They circled through a group of reporters and curious spectators as they came through the court, and a flashlight boomed foggily behind them; but they did not turn their heads. They had had enough of reporters and flashlights in the last few hours to do them for a long time.

"Where'll we eat, hon?" asked Eddie. "Harrison's or —"

"We won't eat," said Irma decisively. "I mean, not till after we take some dinner to a boy friend of mine."

"A boy friend of yours? Say, what —"

"Nothing. Come across to that delicatessen. You'll see."

Under her direction Ed purchased a supply of cold roast pork, potato salad, ice cream, and macaroons. Laden with paper parcels, they recrossed the street and came to the entrance of the Chippewa Arms.

"Say, Irma, where you taking me?"

"That's all right. You'll see in a minute. Eddie, honest, do you think it was Nucci's gang that killed Bellarno and spoiled his little party?"

"Sure! It couldn't be anybody else."

They were in the dim hall of the third floor. Irma rapped on a gray-painted door. No answer.

"He's asleep," she said.

"Who?"

"My boy friend. You'll see."

She chuckled softly and pushed open the door. A cold draft, blowing up from the court, came through the open window and washed them as they entered.

Ephraim Arlington sat humped in his chair, the automatic pistol still gripped in his gnarly fingers. Looking from the door, you would have thought that he was asleep; and he was. Quite asleep.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GOING MY WAY?

by GEORGE HARMON COXE

THE HOT BLACK COFFEE MADE ME feel a little better and I had a second cup while Steve was filling the thermos and making my ham-and-cheese on white. He acted sort of patronizing about that sandwich.

"You gettin' soft or something?" he asked as he wrapped it and shoved it down the counter. "Where's your helper? You goin' it alone?"

I told him I was and kept sipping my coffee.

"Thirty-five," Steve said. "And was I you I'd take it easy with that sandwich."

I knew what he meant. On a long haul it's poor business to eat anything after the first few hours. It makes you sleepy, and sleep is a truck driver's worst enemy. I know because I was following right behind Shorty Bates last year when he hit the side of an overhead crossing and about five tons of lumber slapped him in the back.

So we don't eat much. We drink coffee and chew caffein tablets. Steve's advice was good, all right, but I didn't want to explain the sandwich wasn't for me, so I paid him and said: "I've never gone to sleep yet."

"If you had" — Steve waved his counter rag — "you wouldn't be here. Stay smart."

Outside it was cool and damp, and there was a smell in the air of a storm on its way. Three trucks — a Red-Ball and two Twi-States — were parked in the flood-lighted corral next to the bunkhouse, the protecting glare of the bulbs and reflectors making thick shadows that exaggerated their size.

Madge was still sleeping in her corner of the seat, and after twelve hours of it she still looked swell, with her face shadowed a little by the dim glow of the dash light, and something soft and warm reflecting from the whiteness of her throat. Madge wasn't the fragile fluffy type, but she looked it now. I'd never seen her asleep before and I got a kick out of just looking at her. Somehow, it gave me another angle on marriage; and the idea of being able to see her this way often made me feel pretty good.

She did not wake up when I started the motor, just hunched a little lower in the corner and burrowed the side of her chin in the fur collar of her coat. After I got straightened out on the road I thought about getting an arm around her. I wanted to hold her, have her lean on me. But it was only a thought. You can't drive one of these babies one-handed. I paid attention to the road.

The stretch was straight and flat here. My steady 30 pulled the white lane of concrete back into the headlights in an endless ribbon, and I got to thinking, like I always do, about

Copyright, 1936, by George Harmon Coxe

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Madge and my job, and how long it would be before we saved up the extra $500.

If things had gone right we would have been married by now. We had planned it all last year. How much money we wanted to start off with, and how we were going to get it. Only Madge got sick and lost her job as stenographer, and left me to do the saving. I wanted to get married anyway and live with my folks for a while. But Madge said no. We'd wait until we could have a decent honeymoon and pay cash for the furniture and have a place of our own. That's why I gave up my day run and took this long-haul job. More overtime and more money.

At that it was a grind, trying to build up the $500 she said we needed. Sometimes I guess I got a little bitter about it, wondering whether getting married was worth the struggle. Maybe it would be a struggle after we were married. But there would be some fun, too. This way it was all one-sided. Madge home, and me away most of the time on account of the schedule. Once I tried to figure out how many miles I'd have to drive before we saved the money; but I got discouraged when I began to see how slowly those miles unrolled.

A bump, where the concrete ended and the macadam began, woke Madge up. I looked over and she was watching me, her eyes shiny and smiling, her lips moist. For a minute or so she just sat there, still drowsy and hating to move, then she yawned like a contented kitten and sat up. I forgot about the miles. If someone had offered me what I wanted most in the next minute I'd have taken a kiss and been grateful.

Madge arched her back and stared out of her side of the cab into the darkness. When she looked back at me her smile was gone. She asked me where we were and I told her.

"How much longer?" she wanted to know.

"An hour and a half to New London," I told her. "Two or two and a half to Providence and then you can get out and stretch because I've got to do some unloading."

She looked at her wrist-watch, moving towards me and bending over so she could see the tiny hands in the dash light. "And how long from there to Boston?"

"Another two hours."

"It's a quarter after 12," she said dryly. "We won't get in until after 5."

I pushed the thermos and the sandwich towards her. "You'll feel better after you get rid of this."

I got a surprise then. She sat up straight and said, "You stopped!" with an accusing sort of tone, as though I'd doublecrossed her.

"Sure I stopped," I said maybe I was a little snappy because I thought she'd be glad to get the coffee and would act like she appreciated the sandwich.

"Why didn't you tell me?'

"I thought you'd want all the sleep you could get. I fix it so you get sleep and food too and you crab."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well —" she picked at the waxed paper around the sandwich, her eyes following a sedan that flashed past and cut in front of me. "You might have told me."

We got back on a straight stretch of concrete and I lit a cigarette. I knew what she was irritated about. She hadn't intended to go to sleep: she didn't want to go to sleep. But she had and that made her sore.

You see, on this sort of run there would be some weeks when I'd only get home two or three nights, and that didn't give me much chance to take her to the movies. Lots of times I'd be so tired I'd go to sleep on her when I did take her out, and that was not so glamorous. She knew *why* I was like I was, doing this sort of work, but she hadn't felt the pain of needing sleep, the ache of fighting it when it pulled at your eyelids and your brain was drugged by the droning lullaby of the motor until you saw things on the road that weren't there. To her sleep was just a habit.

I think she came along with me to find out for herself. She wanted to visit an uncle in Boston, and she got the idea that this would be an interesting way of doing it. Besides, she argued, it would save the $3.00 bus fare, wouldn't it? So I fixed it with my boss and here we were.

The truck is a sleeper cab. Not a real modern one, but there is a rough bunk in a sort of little trough behind the seat, with ventilator shutters in each end at the sides of the truck. Red, my helper, could get two or three hours of sleep a night that way and we could keep rolling without too much risk.

I looked over at Madge. She was eating half of the sandwich and sipping coffee from the top of the thermos.

She didn't look at me; I wasn't feeling very sympathetic right then anyway. Because a while back I'd been sorry for her and had tried to get her to crawl over in the bunk and grab a few winks. But she got proud or stubborn or something and wouldn't do it. Now I told myself it was a good thing because after this when I said I needed some sleep maybe she'd know what I meant. And maybe she'd have some idea of what it was like to wrestle a truck for twenty-four hours.

She couldn't know about the cramps that got into the calves of your legs, or the aching stiffness that spread from your back and crept up through your neck and shoulders. But she'd have a taste of it. Just sitting is no picnic. After a while a truck seat gets like one in the bleachers at the end of a double-header. No soft spots any place.

At that, it had been an easy trip. We'd got started about 1 o'clock that noon, and we'd get through between 6 and 7 in the morning. Only about eighteen hours on the road. You can't kick at that. Plenty of times Red and I've been twenty-four hours on the road and 35 on duty, with nothing but a couple winks behind the seat.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Here. You want some?"

I looked around. She was getting ready to pour some coffee into the thermos top.

"Go ahead," I told her. "It's for you. I had some."

"We'll save it then," she said, and put in the cork and screwed on the top.

I didn't argue because we were starting up a hill and I knew I'd have three shifts to make before I got over the top. Halfway up we were crawling and I had plenty of time to look around. Below and to the right was the Sound. You couldn't make out the shore line, but you knew what you saw was water. It was blacker than night, and flat, and a dampness floated up from that direction and chilled the air. I think we could have smelled the sea except for the truck, but all I got was the exhaust and the roar of the engine.

I saw the fellow when I looked back at the road. He was about a hundred yards ahead of us and the headlights made him look small and hunched as he climbed. I waited, sort of holding my breath, and sure enough Madge crashed through.

"Why don't you give him a lift?"

I blew out my breath and said nothing for a minute. I counted them. This was the fifth guy she'd wanted to pick up. The first was just a suggestion, but the argument got stronger every time.

"I've already told you," I said. "I don't give anybody a lift. It's orders."

"Orders," she sniffed. And then, to make it tougher, this guy gives me the thumb.

Going slow like we were, it took us a long time to catch up with him and I could see he was young, and not a bad-looking kid. His clothes were fairly decent, too. I really wanted to stop. I've felt that way before. But I like my job. And I almost lost it once when one of the big shots in the office saw me pull into a checking station with an old guy I'd picked up outside of Scranton. I was lucky to get by with a bawling out because the rules say: *No Pickups!*

You can't blame the company. Ten thousand is nothing for a truck like this. And when I get soft-hearted I think about Madge and how bad I want to get married; and about Lefty Conlon and Sam Spurk. Lefty picked up a guy and got a gun in his side while three other punks came up and ran off with the truck; Sam got kidnaped for a few hours while some hoods got rid of his load.

"How would you like it, walking all night?" Madge asked, disdainful-like. "You'd want a ride wouldn't you?"

"I would," I said, "but I wouldn't expect to get it. Not at this time of night."

"To hear you the whole thing is a racket and every man on the road wants to run off with your truck."

"Listen," I said. Sort of irritably I guess, because here I was being hard — we were just passing the hitchhiker and I could see the sort of hurt disappointment on his face — and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trying to hold down my job and having to argue with Madge to justify myself.

"I know the orders," I went on. "I run into this same thing every night. Only you're not here and I don't have to get bawled out for it. So make out you're not here. Suppose I get caught making a pickup? Suppose I lose my job. Swell, huh? And anyway, whose idea was it, your coming along?"

"I thought you'd like to have me," Madge said and her voice sounded stiff, throaty.

"That's what I thought," I said. "But if you don't like my routine, let it go. I'll get back my day run and we'll wait."

"I don't want to wait," she said and moved up against me and slipped her arm through mine. I melted at that, and then she spoiled it all by tacking on a little more. "Only — I can't help feeling sorry for them. I hope the boy wasn't sick."

I had a crack on the tip of my tongue but I smothered it. She was no shrew, Madge, but every once in a while she'd get on a tear about something and then it was hard to change her mind. She was that capable, big-hearted kind and I had an idea she'd be a little bossy after we were married. But I didn't think I'd mind because I figured she'd be good around the house; good with kids, too. I was glad I didn't say anything. I guess we were both tired — maybe tired of waiting for something that seemed a long time in coming.

It began to drizzle and I started the windshield wiper. We went on without speaking for another couple miles, and then I saw this guy plodding along ahead of us. This time, after the row and everything, I didn't think she'd say anything. A fellow would have kept his mouth shut, knowing how I felt about it. Maybe she was thinking about the kid we passed. I don't know the reason but she went ahead with it.

Her hand tightened on my arm and she said, "Listen, Joe," in that confidential mother-knows-best manner, "I've never been so very wrong before, have I? It's raining and he hasn't even got a coat."

I had no intention of stopping, but right then and there something hot and angry flared up inside of me. What was the sense of working nights, and eating caffein tablets and aching for sleep if it meant being miserable and quarreling. Before I knew it I said, "Okay," and slipped into neutral.

"Oh." That's all she said but there was a lot of pleased thanks in her voice. I couldn't tell whether she was proud of me, or tickled silly because she'd had her way and I was breaking regulations.

I braked down, and I could see now that this new fellow was small and thin, and that he didn't expect a lift. He hadn't bothered to turn around.

"I hope I get fired for it. I hope this guy pulls a gun and makes us walk in, and then maybe you'll keep your nose out of my business."

That's what I said, and at the time

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I meant it, I was that sore. Madge took time to look around at me and her dark eyes were narrowed and angry and hurt. She said, "Joe Martin. You ought to be ashamed," and then she flounced around on the seat and looked at our customer as the truck stopped.

Well, this guy was surprised, all right. Maybe because I stopped, and maybe because he looked up and saw Madge hanging out looking at him. She had to tell him to get in, and when she pushed over on the seat she whispered, "Now don't be nasty to him either."

A car swung around a curve up ahead, spotlighted us. I hoped it wasn't a stockholder of the company or a friend of the boss when I shifted; then I took a look at our passenger. His clothes were a network of wrinkles and the rain glistened on his shapeless felt hat. His face was thin and very white and tired-looking except for the gray eyes which were shrewd and bright and kind of wary; not what you'd expect in a pickup like this. I remembered about the eyes later.

"Well," he said when he got settled. "Well, this is fine. Mighty nice of you. So many trucks passed me I didn't think you'd stop. At night and all. Appreciate it, though."

"You would have been wet through if you had gone on much longer," Madge said, her voice warm and friendly. "How far are you going?"

"Far as I can."

"Well, we're going to Boston." She gave me a quick, superior glance that seemed like an effort to mock my suspicions.

Nobody spoke for a minute or so and then he said, talking to Madge, "I'd never expect to find anyone like you on a truck. Are you — is he your husband?"

"No," Madge said, "that is, not yet." And then, ignoring me to keep me in my place, she went on to tell him all about it, giving it to him from start to finish. She had a good listener and I guess it was a story she liked to hear and talk about. There was something triumphant and maybe a little proud in the way she went on. She even repeated herself when she explained that I didn't have to be making these overnight trips but that I was doing it so we could save money and get married that much quicker.

I didn't say anything because I was still sore; and I stayed sore because she had been right and everything had turned out okay. Besides, it burned me to see her being so confidential to a stranger.

For the next few minutes I paid attention to my job while we went through New London. When we had crossed the bridge I took a quick look at this fellow.

I could see now that he wasn't a bad little guy. Tucked off in the corner with one hand in his coat pocket, he was quiet and kind and helpless-looking and appreciative of the ride. I began to feel a little sheepish about it. Madge was right again. She usually was. And I had an idea I'd hear about this thing, the rest of my life prob-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ably, whenever Madge could use it as an illustration to win an argument.

After a while Madge began to question him. He answered her, too. Not always right away, but he answered. Edward Wainright, he said his name was. That sounded familiar, although I couldn't place it.

"How far are you going?" Madge asked him.

"Well," he said, hesitating a little, "I'd like to get into Canada." And then Madge came out with a typical woman's question.

"Why?"

That stopped him for a minute. When he finally answered he said, "Well, the police are looking for me, I'm supposed to be in prison but I had a bit of luck."

He spoke quietly, simply, like a man commenting on the weather, but he couldn't have jarred me more if he'd shouted. I thought, "Well, here goes the job and everything else," while my nerves tightened up like violin strings.

He kept on talking in that quiet, weary tone, but I knew right then who he was. You don't get to read the papers regularly on a job like this. Still I knew something about him.

He had killed a man named Tabor who had been bothering his wife. I think a real good lawyer could have got him off with self-defense but as it was they gave him five to eight years. And then he had escaped while a deputy was taking him from the courthouse. I could see why now. Because he looked so docile and harmless. This deputy, underrating him, had put one cuff on him and was holding the other. Wainright tripped the deputy and jerked the cuff from the fellow's hand. He was small, he was lucky to lose himself in the crowd until he could steal a car.

"You see," Wainright explained, "I've had a lot of tough luck these past three years. Sickness. No job. Lost my house. Ruth, that's my wife, was the only one that brought in any money.

"She shouldn't have worked at all because of her lungs, but she was a good stenographer and she made 30 a week at it. I tried to get her to take the few hundred we had and go West, to Arizona or New Mexico and see if we couldn't make some sort of a living while her lungs got strong. But she was afraid to give up her job — and it was a long time before I found out that in order to keep working she had to put up with a lot of offensive attention from her boss, this Tabor.

"Well, the details don't matter. Anyway, I came back to our place one night. I heard her scream as I reached for the door-knob, and they were still struggling when I went in. I guess it looked worse than it was because Ruth had been fighting so hard her hair was down and the sleeve of her dress was torn."

Wainright paused and looked at me. I could see that his eyes were hard and metallic, and didn't fit his face.

"Maybe you know how I felt. Ruth

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tried to smooth it over. Tabor was a — well, arrogant, disdainful. He was twice as big as I am and when I told him to get out he laughed. There was a gun in a table drawer and I grabbed it. To get him out, that's all; to get him out so Ruth wouldn't see him laugh at me. He started for me and he was ugly. When he grabbed me I pulled the trigger."

Wainright looked away and his voice was apologetic. "I suppose it was a fool thing to do. I don't seem to regret it — about Tabor. I do when I think of what Ruth went through. What money we had went for the lawyer. I knew she'd never get West. She had luck enough to get another job while I was waiting trial and she wouldn't give it up. She had to live, she said; and I'd need things in prison.

"I really had no intention of trying to escape. The thought just came to me while I was walking with that jailer." Wainright moved his free hand in a shrugging gesture. "My luck held. I've seen Ruth. We talked things over and she wanted me to go back, said she'd wait for me. I didn't tell her I thought she'd be dead before I was free.

"They've got a reward out for me, but I decided to take a chance, and well, my luck is still holding. I guess you can see what this ride means."

We went on for about five miles with nobody saying a word. The lights of a passing car flashed briefly into the cab. Twice my eyes slid towards Wainright and I jerked them back. I was beginning to get scared but I couldn't miss the irony of the set-up: Madge had her way; I had my angry wish — except that I'd picked up a murderer instead of a gunman. And here we were, riding side by side. It was Madge who spoke first.

"How far have you come today?"

"Well," Wainright said awkwardly, as though we had a right to know but he didn't want to tell, "I've been going since 5 o'clock."

"You'll have to keep going after you leave us, too," Madge said. "Why don't you lie down in back of the seat for a while. There's a place and —"

Her voice trailed off, and when I looked at her, her face was white.

Wainright kept right on surprising me. He said he guessed he would, and climbed over the seat, stretched out on his side. Madge shoved over towards me then, but she didn't say a word. Neither did I. I just did a lot of thinking in a very short time while the whining suck of tires on the wet concrete and the rumble of the truck droned out a weird accompaniment.

By that time I was plenty scared; scared in a nervous, jittery way because I didn't know what was coming next. Sort of panicky, like one time I was swimming a long way from shore and something brushed up against my leg. I didn't think this guy would hurt Madge, and I didn't have room for any "I told you so" thoughts. I don't know what worried me most, my truck and my job — or Wainright.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The guy's loony, I thought. But that didn't comfort me any. I couldn't figure his attitude, or why he told us his story. And he kept one hand in his pocket. I didn't like that either, although there was no kick in the way he'd been behaving. The whole thing was a headache, screwy. It didn't make sense.

I kept worrying about all these things until I got the germ of an idea which began to blossom of its own accord. I got to thinking about the reward.

I didn't know how much it was, but I told myself it must be at least 500. And it seemed worth a try when I thought of how sick I was of this night and day job, and seeing Madge once or twice a week and the rest of the time thinking how much I wanted her and how long I had to wait. One half of my brain argued that way; the other half argued: This guy has had enough tough breaks. You'd be a heel to turn him in.

Well, telling myself I'd be a heel only made me try to justify myself. After all, this guy had killed a man. He had been convicted and who was I to say the sentence wasn't just? Certainly the yarn he'd given us was prejudiced.

Somebody would get him anyway, I argued, so why not me? My story would be that he was hiding in the truck, that I didn't pick him up. And it shouldn't be too tough. He was a little fellow and I thought I could take him with one hand.

When I remembered my blackjack I began to get confident. It wasn't a blackjack really; it was more like a policeman's night stick. I had it for emergencies and it was in a little holder fastened to the front, upright part of the seat beside my right leg. A quick little crack with that, not too hard, and —

Keeping my eyes on the road, I reached down for that club. I did it slowly, easily, while the tires sucked wetly on the concrete and the strident whine of the windshield wiper topped the rumble of the truck: vague faraway sounds submerged by the pounding of my heart. My fingers slid along the polished surface of the handle and suddenly my nerves tightened up on me and I was sweating and scared again. Then I felt a hand on my wrist. Madge's hand.

I held steady for a moment or so, tensed, holding my breath. I don't think she knew about that stick, but something must have told her what was in my mind, what I was up to. She kept holding my wrist, her hand soft and hot, until I let go of the stick and reached for the wheel.

I glanced over at her. She still looked stiff-lipped and she shook her head the least bit, her dark eyes round and wide with some inner disturbance.

I exhaled, relaxed. And now that she'd made up our minds, damned if I wasn't glad. I felt relieved, sort of buoyant inside. I knew now that it would have been a crummy trick after he had trusted us with his story.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When we started through Providence I knew I'd have to tell Wainright to get out before we got to the warehouse. I was wondering how to say it when he sat up on the bunk, told me to pull off my regular route and go down a side street.

I got sort of cold all over and began to curse myself for not slugging him when I had the chance. I made the turn and was thinking, "Here's where the stick-up comes," when he said, still speaking softly:

"I guess I can give you the rest of the story now. I'm not going to Canada; I'm getting out here. I was going to look up a fellow I know to do the job, but I think you'll do even better because I'm not sure I can trust him."

I kept driving without saying a word.

"That reward adds up to $3,000 now," he went on. "And I figured out a plan when I talked with Ruth. I want that reward — or part of it. I've got to have it for her. $2,000 will be enough to keep her out West for two years if she lives simply. And two years in that climate will mend her lungs. That's all I want. The other thousand is your share if you take me in."

Even then I didn't know what the score was. I didn't believe him. I just sat there slack-jawed, driving automatically. When I could think it was, "Now I know he's loony." I finally said, "I don't like it."

"I don't blame you," Wainright said. "It sounds crooked. But look at it my way. They want me. They're willing to pay. I'm broke. I'll never get away, and I don't want to. But somebody will collect that reward. Probably a bunch of cops."

He climbed over on the seat. I was in too much of a fog to say anything. I just sat there with my palms damp on the wheel, not knowing I was holding my breath until I blew it out.

"It's a cinch, really. Say I stuck you up." Wainright pulled a heavy-looking automatic out of his pocket and I knew I'd guessed right about *that* anyway. "And I got careless and you jumped me. You can't lose your job that way, and you can make twice the 500 you need."

"How do you know I won't hold out the whole 3,000," I stalled, concentrating on keeping my voice flat.

"You won't," Wainright said. "I've been sizing you up. I like your girl. She's honest. When I heard you needed money, too, I decided to risk my story. I had to be sure. That's why I played meek and got in back — to give you a chance to jump me."

"Suppose I had," I said, and my voice was stiff, like my muscles.

"I had the drop on you all the time." Wainright waved the gun. "I might not have shot you, but I'd dumped you out and taken the truck until I got clear. Then I would have tried to make it here and looked up the fellow I told you about. But the two of you are better than he is. And you played square with me. How about it? Make up your mind."

I saw the green lights of a police

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

station two blocks ahead, and then I remembered that this was the town where Wainright had lived and been arrested. The sweat came out on my forehead. I couldn't make myself say either yes or no. I mumbled, "Well —" and that seemed to be enough for Wainright.

"Get a story and stick to it," he hurried on. "I'm bringing you right to the station so you won't have to split that money with the police. When you collect, $2,000 goes to my wife. I'll give you a letter later." His voice got sharp, incisive. "Promise now, both of you!"

Madge and I said, "I promise!" in a sort of mechanical chorus.

He gave me the automatic, and even then if he'd started blasting I'd have been no more surprised. And then I knew I had to go through with it. I stopped in front of the station house and we went up the steps with the gun in Wainright's back and Madge tagging behind me.

There was a uniformed officer sitting behind the dais-like desk, and a chubby fellow with a freckled face and glasses lounging against the rail.

Wainright said, "Hello, Lieutenant," wearily.

The fellow looked up, stared at Wainright; then at me and the gun. He put down his pen and leaned back in the chair and finally grinned.

"Well, well," he said. "Hello, Eddy. Welcome home. Where you been keeping yourself?"

The freckle-faced fellow bounded off the rail. "What the —" he flung out. "What —" His eyes widened behind his glasses and his face folded up in a grin. "Boy," he breathed, "is this gonna be something." He stepped over to me. "I'm Malloy, of *The Leader*. What's the story?"

I gave it to him. At first I was stiff-lipped and jumpy, but I improved as I went along; I turned on the innocence and kept talking fast so he couldn't interrupt. When I wound up I had things under control and I made my voice hard. "Just remember that there's a reward and that I brought this guy in alone."

Malloy's hand came up in a confident gesture. "I'll remember." He turned and grinned at the Lieutenant who was looking kind of sour. "It'll be a pleasure."

Two plainclothesmen came in and took Wainright and the gun. Malloy grabbed a phone and the Lieutenant steered us into a little anteroom and left us alone. The moment the door closed Madge was in my arms. She pulled my head down and clung to me, hard. I held her tight because suddenly I was shaky again. We stood there like that, not talking, for quite a while. Then I did what I'd wanted to do — about three months ago, it seemed — after we'd left Steve's.

Wainright's wife is living out in Arizona while he serves out his term.

I guess it was a good break in some other ways, too. I'm on a day run now, and Madge and I like married life. She's boss around the house, and I do the driving.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NOR CUSTOM STALE 'TEC'S INFINITE VARIETY

Back in 1945, when EQMM announced its First Annual Detective Story Contest, Vincent Starrett wrote a piece in his always fascinating column ("Books Alive" in the "Chicago Sunday Tribune") in which he listed all the detectival devices and gumshoe gimmicks he could think of that have grown stale and stagnant through overuse; and Mr. Starrett predicted (with unimpeachable accuracy, as it turned out) that none of these hackneyed concepts would prove to be the basic plot-idea of the story destined to win First Prize. Shortly after Mr. Starrett's column appeared, we received a telegram from Craig Rice. The message read: SEND ME COMPLETE CATALOGUE OF STARRETT'S COMMONPLACE CONTRIVANCES. *We complied, with the strong conviction that we knew why Craig Rice wanted Vincent's list — not to avoid using the stereotyped schemes, but perhaps to put them all together in a single story! But our intuition failed us — at least, we never received such a tale from Craig Rice.*

Then five years later we came upon a letter that Craig Rice wrote to Bennett Cerf and which Mr. Cerf quoted in his always fascinating column ("Trade Winds" in "The Saturday Review of Literature"). Craig Rice opined:

"The ancient gag of the B-picture director who announced, 'The boss says, don't use any more old clichés, so we gotta think up some new clichés,' reminds me of some worn-out mystery clichés I'd like to see abolished. The hardboiled private eye, for example, who starts out broke and invariably gets a beautiful blonde client who pays off in hundred-dollar bills. The heiress bride who wonders, until almost too late, why her shifty-eyed husband spends so much time digging in the basement. The girl who knows something that will give the murderer away, but can't think what.

"Me, I'm getting pretty weary of the Indestructible Man, too, who, in every chapter, takes punishment that would put Joe Louis in the hospital for a month.

"On the other hand, I'm waiting for someone to write a mystery novel using all *the clichés, including identical twins, a homicidal butler, an old lady in a wheel chair who walks around when everybody is asleep, and*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

beginning with the words 'Had I but known.' I bet it would be a best seller . . ."

Well, maybe our original hunch was right! Craig Rice did *intend to take all the trite 'tec tricks and fashion them into one whopping, jumbo, economy-size story — but she just never got around to it, and is now waiting for someone else to make a tour de force out of strictly stock stratagems. Who knows? — as a novel, it might be a best seller, and as a short story, it might win a First Prize . . .*

Anyway, here is a brand-new tale by Craig Rice — a tale of the screwy, cockeyed, thoroughly unscrupulous John J. Malone, who in his own way is also an Indestructible Man — at least, he seems to have an Indestructible Stomach. But other than one more oblique similarity to the clichés mentioned above, you will find none of the common criminological usages listed either by Mr. Starrett or Miss Rice — no tough, trenchcoat 'tec, no bride in jeopardy or damsel in distress, positively no twins or butler or old lady in a wheel chair. But you will find Craig Rice's special blend of humor-and-homicide, gags-and-gore . . .

AND THE BIRDS STILL SING

by CRAIG RICE

THE HANDS OF THE CLOCK IN Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar had moved to where they looked like a cartoonist's idea of Oriental eyebrows. The customers had dwindled down to a janitor from the City Hall, a pair of slightly drunken reporters from the *Tribune*, an anonymous drunk who had just wandered in, and John J. Malone, Chicago's most famous (and at the moment, most disheveled and disconsolate) criminal lawyer.

It was with John J. Malone that Joe the Angel was having the argument. It was an old, familiar argument, and nobody was paying any attention.

"Always I am your friend," Joe the Angel said. "But is it my fault you spend your money on women, and you do not have enough to pay your bar bill?"

"It's only $32," Malone said in righteous indignation.

"Malone," Joe said tearfully. "I am a poor man." He went on into details of his mother-in-law's recent operation, his cousin's traffic ticket, the mortgage payments on his brother's undertaking parlor, and similar grim details until, carried away by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his own eloquence, he automatically poured Malone a drink.

Malone downed it fast, before Joe could change his mind, and said gloomily, "Only $32. And besides, the girl hocked the bracelet and spent the money on another guy."

"Serve you right," Joe the Angel said, polishing a glass. He stared at Malone and decided it would take more than a diamond bracelet. The little lawyer was a not-handsome ruin. His expensive Finchley suit looked as though Malone had been sleeping under the seats of a west-side street car. But, of course, Malone's suits always looked like that. His Sulka tie had somehow got under his ear. And there was a slight suggestion of a mouse under one eye, a left-over from the night before last's poker game.

"Some day," Malone said, "some woman will spend money on *me*."

"I doubt it," Joe the Angel said sorrowfully.

He was never so wrong in his life. It was just about then that the blonde came in. Even the City Hall janitor lifted his head to look. Her hair was the color of dyed sunlight, her mascaraed eyes were the color of a bottomless lake in a cheap postcard, her mouth was like a recently washed strawberry. She wore enough mink to line a bathtub.

She flashed about $1200 worth of white teeth at Joe the Angel and asked for John J. Malone.

For once Joe the Angel was speechless. He merely pointed.

She slid onto the bar stool next to Malone, smiled at him and said, "Hello, Mr. Malone. I'm Mona Trent. May I buy you a drink?"

Malone was about to say gallantly, "No, but may I buy you a drink?" when Joe beat him to the draw by setting out glasses and saying, "What will you have, Malone?"

The drink was down, and a second one ordered before she said, "Mr. Malone, I need your help. A friend of mine — I'd rather not mention his name — recommended you, and said I might find you here."

"If it's a traffic ticket —" Malone began.

"It's something far more serious."

Malone took another look at her, and realized she was frightened, badly frightened.

"I can't talk to you here," she said very quietly, "and I've got to leave here alone." She gave him that smile again. "Can you come up to my apartment at 10 tomorrow morning?" Without waiting for him to answer, she wrote down the address and handed it to him.

"Ten," Malone said, tucking the card in his pocket. "But —"

"Tomorrow," she said firmly. She beamed at Joe the Angel and said, "The check, please."

"That will be $32," Joe said, without blinking.

A half-minute later she pulled two $20 bills from her purse, tossed them on the counter, and said, "Keep the change." Then she turned to Malone and added, "Consider this a down

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

payment on what I want you to do for me."

Before he could catch his breath, she was gone.

Five minutes later, Malone said, "Joe, I too am an honest man. There is $8 change coming. All I want is half of it." He stuffed the $4 in his vest pocket, paused halfway to the door, and said, "There's an all-night poker game going on at the Atlantis. If you'll lend me that other four —"

There were times, Joe the Angel reflected, after the little lawyer had gone, when he wondered why he even bothered about Malone.

It was a cold and very dreary morning when Malone arrived at the apartment on Chicago's near-north side. The poker game hadn't gone too well, there had been other complications, and it had all ended him up with his owing Joe the Angel $4 and having just enough left for two short taxi rides. And on top of everything else, it was raining — a cold, dismal February rain.

He consoled himself with the reminder that he had a client — and what a client! The little lawyer closed his eyes and thought about Mona Trent.

Furthermore, he'd managed to borrow $32 from Maggie, his long-suffering secretary, and he had planned and rehearsed a magnificent gesture of returning it to Mona. She, of course, would offer him a handsome retainer for whatever she wanted him to do. Given just the right poker game, he could easily run that retainer into important money. Then there would be another magnificent gesture when he returned the retainer to her, along with a well-chosen present.

It was a wonderful dream.

In a moment of utter madness he tipped the cab-driver 50 cents, and regretted it immediately.

The sight of the building in which she lived raised his spirits a good inch and a half. It was in a block of houses once built by multi-millionaires, later inhabited by mere millionaires, finally turned into apartments rented by semi-millionaires, and eventually taken over by just plain citizens who could afford that much rent.

The maid who opened the door was just a shade less gorgeous than Mona herself. Malone began thinking about a suitable present for her, and reflected that her French accent was so flawless that she must be the product of a high-class dramatic school.

"Mees Trent ees een zhe leeving room. Zhall I eentrodooce you?"

"I'd rather surprise her," Malone said.

But it was Mona Trent who surprised him.

The French accent slipped off the lovely little maid like a hunk of butter sliding off a hot pancake. She said, "What the heck goes on here?"

Malone paused for just one minute in the doorway. It was daytime, but the lights were on and the shades were all drawn. He looked at Mona Trent and had the momentary sensa-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion of just having swallowed an ice-cube, complete with all four corners.

She was sitting in a big chair near the window, and the coat for which an untold number of mink had loved and died was tossed carelessly on the nearby sofa. There was a neat little bullet hole in her forehead, she she was as dead as yesterday's newspapers.

"She's dead, isn't she!" the maid whispered just back of Malone's left ear. Almost automatically she pulled up the window shades.

"If she isn't," Malone said grimly, "the Coroner is going to be the most surprised man in the state of Illinois. Now, where is the phone?"

"I'm a citizen and a taxpayer, and I know my rights," Malone said indignantly. "Look, von Flanagan, it isn't every day I get a client like this, and you let her get killed."

Captain von Flanagan of Homicide stared glumly at the mirror over Joe the Angel's bar and said nothing. It was an eloquently profane silence.

"The least you can do," Malone went on relentlessly, "is to find the murderer and recommend me as defense lawyer."

"Find the murderer," von Flanagan said. He sighed deeply.

The Medical Examiner's report had been that Mona Trent had been killed by a .22 caliber rifle bullet penetrating the brain. The time? Probably around 5 in the morning.

Malone scowled at his beer and said, "A fine, efficient police department! People in the neighborhood reported hearing shots at five in the morning. A couple of dumb lugs in a squad car make a routine investigation and that's all. When they could have probably picked up the murderer right in her apartment."

"She was shot through the window," von Flanagan reminded him.

"Just the same," Malone said insistently, "they might have noticed someone carrying a rifle."

The big police officer waved for more beer. "They made an arrest," he said.

Malone snorted with indignation. "Sure. They pick up Louis Perino. Just because he's a a small-time racketeer. Then you smart cops find out he never heard of Mona Trent in his life, doesn't own a .22 caliber rifle and probably wouldn't know how to fire one, and you let him go."

Joe the Angel poured two beers and said, "This is on the house. Louis Perino, he works for a big-shot gambler named Eddie Carter. Mona Trent, she used to be Eddie's girl, and the boys say he didn't like it when she quit him for some rich society guy."

Malone and von Flanagan stared at Joe the Angel and then at each other. Von Flanagan lunged for the phone booth. Malone finished his beer and said, "Joe, sometimes I think you ought to be head of Homicide."

"Well," Maggie said acidly as Malone walked in his office, "I see you lost a client."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Malone muttered something about not rubbing it in.

There was still, he reflected, the $32. But he had already decided to spend that on flowers for Mona's funeral. Joe the Angel's younger brother, who ran an undertaking parlor, could probably get them for him at a cut rate.

"Cheer up," Maggie said. "You've got another client. A pair of them. Mr. and Mrs. Paul Cartwright. They're waiting in your private office."

Malone frowned at her. No client or prospective client was ever ushered into his private office without his presence and considerable impressive ceremony.

"They didn't look like the sort of people to be kept waiting in an anteroom," Maggie said.

"Good girl," Malone said approvingly. Maggie could smell money two miles off — three miles on a clear day.

He went in with his best professional smile and greeted them cordially. "So sorry to have kept you waiting!"

"Quite all right," Paul Cartwright said. "You had no way of knowing we were here."

The little lawyer sat down behind his time-battered desk and quietly looked them over. He guessed Mrs. Cartwright would be in her early forties. Once, she must have been almost a beauty, in a thin, well-bred sort of way. Her hair was brown. Just plain hair-color, Malone described it to himself. Her eyes were an undistinguished blue, her skin on the pale side. Her obviously expensive suit was exactly what the well-dressed woman will wear to a lawyer's office.

Her husband was a big man, gray-haired, deeply tanned. He looked as though he should have been posing for an advertisement, with a whiskey glass in his hand and a hunting dog asleep at his feet.

"Mr. Malone," Paul Cartwright said, "what is the penalty for shooting birds in the city of Chicago?"

Malone blinked. "I don't think there is any," he said, "and if there is, it ought to be repealed at once." He detested birds.

A smile of relief crossed Mrs. Cartright's face.

"There, Leonora," her husband said, "I told you there was nothing to worry about."

"But I did worry," she said. She turned to Malone. "I suffer terribly from insomnia. And for weeks the birds outside my window have been keeping me awake in the early morning. They start in chirping at the crack of dawn, and keep it up for hours. This morning, I was frantic and — I shot one of them."

"You deserve a bounty," Malone assured her.

The Cartwrights rose to go. Paul Cartwright murmured something polite about Malone's bill. Malone gestured magnificently and said, "If you'll leave your address with my secretary, I'll have her send you a bill."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The door had barely closed behind them when Maggie came in, her eyes blazing. "You could have collected it in cash!"

"These do not look like the type of people from whom one collects in cash," Malone said.

She sniffed. "Here's the latest edition of the newspapers. I paid for them with my own money. Just because I thought you'd be interested." She slammed the door when she went out.

Malone looked thoughtfully at the headlines. Eddie Carter and Louis Perino had been picked up for questioning in connection with the murder of ex-show girl Mona Trent. After a minute or two, Malone picked up the phone and called von Flanagan.

"Tell Eddie Carter not to talk to anybody until I get there. And be sure to tell him I'm his lawyer. Oh, yes, you will! Do you want me to tell your wife about that time in the roadhouse near Wheaton—?" He hung up the phone with a smile.

The anteroom outside von Flanagan's office was jampacked with reporters and photographers. They leaped at Malone like a pack of undernourished wolves spying a rabbit.

Malone said coyly, "I have no statement to make beyond the fact that Eddie Carter is my client and that he is innocent." He paused, winked, and said, "And if you'd like to interview Eddie Carter in person, stick around until I open the door."

As he walked into von Flanagan's office, he heard the police officer saying ". . . it's no use, Carter. Perino has talked."

Malone slammed the door shut and said, "And just what did Perino say?"

"None of your business," von Flanagan said. On a quick double-take he added, "Oh, all right. He admitted Carter, here, was paying him to hang around this babe's apartment, and—"

"Don't call Mona no babe," Eddie Carter snarled.

Eddie Carter had been a jockey, a good or bad many years ago, and he still looked like one—except that no jockey had ever been able to afford the clothes, jewelry, and checkbook that Eddie Carter had on his person.

He turned to Malone and said, "Unnerstand you're defendin' me, Malone. Damn good thing, too. On account of—"

"Perino's confessed," von Flanagan said, in the weary voice of one who has repeated the same words a hundred times.

"You're a dirty liar," Eddie Carter said.

"Just a minute," Malone said. "I'm in charge here." He took a cigar from his pocket, slid off the cellophane wrapper, and said to von Flanagan, "I trust you understand that there are a few things sacred between a lawyer and his client."

Von Flanagan's broad face turned purple. He clenched his teeth as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

though he were holding back words that would not be sacred under any circumstances. Finally he said, "Okay, Malone, you want to talk to him about the size of his retainer. I have to go to the barber shop anyway." He left the office through his private door.

Eddie Carter said, "Honest t'Pete, Malone, I didn't have nothin' t'do w'it it, but that crazy Perino" — he reached for his checkbook and said, "How much?"

"Use your own judgment," Malone said, hoping for the best. "But here's what I want you to do —"

Five minutes later he opened the door to the anteroom and said softly, "Okay, boys."

Flash-bulbs and questions popped simultaneously at Eddie Carter, who sat with his face buried in his hands. At last he looked up, his face wet, mopped at his cheeks with a handkerchief which had just made a quick trip to von Flanagan's water cooler, and sobbed. "I'll get d'guy who killed her if it takes d'rest of my life."

He looked at the hankerchief, threw it on the floor, and said "Any a'you guys got sumpin I can blow my nose on?"

Malone whipped his own out fast and said, "Take it easy, Eddie."

Eddie Carter blew his nose noisily, stood up, and said "Okay, whatcha wanna know? I loved her. She was a wunnerful girl. Sure, I had Louie keep an eye on her. Why? Because I wanna know she's happy, see? That's all."

He sank down in the chair again and buried his face in Malone's handkerchief. More flash-bulbs popped. Inspired, Eddie decided to add a line of his own. He looked up and said, "Even if I had of wanted to kill her, I wouldn't of done it."

The mob rushed out. Buddy McHugh of the *Herald-American* paused long enough at the doorway to murmur to Malone, "If you ever get tired of being a lawyer, you ought to move to Hollywood. You'd be a great director!"

The door closed. Eddie Carter mopped his brow, handed Malone back his handkerchief, and said, "I hope I done all right. And here's your dough."

Malone said, "You did swell." He looked at the figure on the check, and leaned against von Flanagan's desk just in time to save himself from fainting.

And at that moment von Flanagan burst into the office, his red face beaming.

"Well, *Mr.* Carter, I guess you can go," he said happily, "and you won't need a lawyer. We've got a woman in here who has confessed to murdering Mona Trent. We've checked her story, and it's absolutely foolproof. I'm sorry we've put you to so much trouble. Mr. Perino is waiting for you in the lobby, and we've ordered a car to drive you home."

Malone finally caught his breath, and said hoarsely, "You realize, my client here can sue you for false arrest."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Forget it," Eddie Carter said. "Y'just gimme d'check back." He all but snatched it from Malone's hands and was out of the office faster than a cat can climb a telephone pole.

It was a good two minutes before Malone was able to say, "At least, you might have waited to break the news until I'd had time to cash the check." He threw the remains of his cigar inaccurately at the cuspidor, broke out a new one, and said, "At least, you might tell me who she is." He lit the new cigar and added, "She probably needs a good defense lawyer."

"I'm giving you a break," von Flanagan said. "You're going to meet her right now."

The woman who was escorted through the door was Leonora Cartwright, very pale, and wearing exactly what the well-dressed woman will wear when confessing to murder.

Malone noticed with satisfaction that von Flanagan also rose as she came in the door. What was it Maggie had said? "*Not the sort of people to be kept waiting* —"

She acknowledged von Flanagan's introduction with a very wan and very forced smile and said, "I've already had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Malone."

Then suddenly her well-bred self-assurance fell away from her, like a wrap handed to the maid at the door, and she said, "Oh, Mr. Malone, I'm sorry, so terribly sorry, that I lied to you today. You see, I knew that I had killed that — that Miss Trent."

Von Flanagan's politeness fell away even faster, and he roared at Malone, "You mean, this woman came to see you about this, and you didn't tell me?"

"She came to see me," Malone said, "about shooting a bird. So help me, until this minute, I had no idea she had anything to do with the case." He smiled at her reassuringly and said, "Go ahead, you can say anything you want to, because you're in the presence of your lawyer, and I'll deny every word of it in court anyway."

This time her smile was more wistful than wan. She said, "Part of it was true. About the birds, I mean."

Malone looked at von Flanagan and said, "Call in a stenographer. My client, Mrs. Paul Cartwright, is about to dictate a confession, which, on my advice, she will sign." He smiled at her while von Flanagan was busy on the intercom, and whispered in what his friends and enemies called his best cell-side manner, "Don't worry. I've never lost a client yet."

She looked at him the way a small child looks at a dream of Santa Claus.

She told the story just as she had told it to Malone a few hours before, but this time there were more details.

"I, Leonora Cartwright, make this confession of my own free will and —"

"Never mind the prelude," Malone said, chewing savagely on his cigar. "The stenographer will fill that in. Just tell the story."

"I've been suffering terribly from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

insomnia," she said, in that lovely, limpid voice. "Especially just about daylight. That's the time of day when one *most* wants to sleep. And those birds —" She paused, smiled, and said softly, "Sometimes it seemed as though they were talking. I could fit words to the sounds they made —"

"Look here, Malone," von Flanagan roared, "if you're trying to build up an insanity defense —"

"Shut up," Malone said calmly. "Let her tell her story. I haven't heard all of it yet, and I'd like to." He smashed out his cigar, reached for another one, and said gently, "Go on, Mrs. Cartwright."

"Last night was — particularly bad. There was a frightfully noisy party going on next door. Finally, I took a sleeping pill. I fell asleep, but the birds woke me, at dawn. I was — a little groggy, I think. You know how it is when you've taken a sleeping pill, and something wakes you. I was, honestly, frantic. I got up and woke Paul, and told him I was going to shoot those birds. He was pretty sleepy too — but he handed me the rifle and said, 'Go ahead and shoot'."

She paused, and caught her breath. "I should have known better. And I'm a notoriously poor shot. I fired. Twice. And then I was frightened. Paul put the rifle away and helped me back to bed."

Again she smiled, that wistful, almost childlike smile. "I slept, then," she said.

After an almost unbearably long silence, the stenographer said, in a brisk, professional voice, "Yes, Mrs. Cartwright?"

"This morning," Leonora Cartwright almost whispered, "I learned about — that — about Miss Trent. And I knew I'd killed her. That's all." She smiled at the stenographer and said, "I'll sign that when it's ready. And thank you."

Von Flanagan said, "Yes, but how about your going to Malone's office to establish the fact that you *had* been shooting at birds?"

"Paul thought it was wise. I realized later that it wasn't. That's why I came down here."

Malone finished lighting his cigar and said, "See? The best you can do with this is accidental death."

"The best I can do with this," von Flanagan said coldly, "is first-degree murder." He turned to Leonora Cartwright and said, "There are a few facts you left out of that so-called confession. One, Mona Trent was your husband's — shall we say — friend? Two, he insisted on that particular apartment you lived in, because it was next door to Mona Trent's — so he could not only visit her more conveniently but also watch her apartment through the windows, and make sure that she was — well, let's say — behaving herself."

Leonora Cartwright moaned, very softly.

Von Flanagan went on relentlessly, "Three, you bitterly resented the taking of that apartment, because you were insanely jealous of Mona Trent. And finally," he gave Malone

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a triumphant look, "you discovered that at one time your husband had been married to Mona Trent, and there was considerable doubt as to whether their divorce had been legal. She wasn't blackmailing him — she was too smart for that. But she knew you wouldn't like it if she tried to pin a bigamy rap on him. It wouldn't look good in the newspapers."

"Don't pay any attention to him," Malone said. "He's just bluffing." He wished he could put more conviction into his voice.

"Am I?" von Flanagan snarled. "You said the police department was inefficient. Well, we get around and ask questions too. Motive and opportunity. Her fingerprints on the gun. Her phony story about the birds . . . We're holding her for murder, Malone."

There was another long silence. Then Leonora Cartwright said, "Mr. Malone — this is a rather new experience to me. But there must be certain formalities — I mean — about your retainer —" She had been fumbling in her purse, and finally brought out a checkbook and a fountain pen.

"Forget it," Malone said magnificently. "I'll discuss it with your husband."

"No," she said, in that strangely musical voice. "Because you see, it's all my money. Paul doesn't have any." She finished writing a check, handed it to Malone. "Will this be enough, for now?"

"Of course," Malone said, not looking at the check. He folded it and slipped it in his vest pocket. He said to himself — *not the sort of people to keep waiting in an anteroom, or to discuss money with.* "And now, von Flanagan, may I have a word with my client?"

Von Flanagan growled, "Five minutes."

"I'll need only two," Malone said smoothly, as von Flanagan left the room. He waited a moment, and said, "Mrs. Cartwright, in a minute or so, you're going to have to walk through that door, with a police matron on one side and your lawyer on the other. There will be a bunch of newspaper reporters and photographers waiting for that moment. Think of something to say. And for the love of Mike, don't collapse — it looks like the devil in a picture. What I'm trying to say is, make with the dignity."

She smiled at him and said, "I think you can trust me, Mr. Malone."

Looking at her, and thinking of the photographers, Malone began to wish he was wearing the necktie a famous actor had sent him from Hollywood last Christmas.

Luckily, the police matron turned out to be tall and stocky, with a broad, fat face, making Leonora Cartwright seem all the more delicate. She faced the barrage of questions and cameras with that very sad, very sweet little smile, chin up, and standing very straight.

"Yes," she said, "I did kill Mona Trent. But it was an accident." She waited for another set of flash-bulbs

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to pop, and added, "I'm very fortunate in having Mr. John J. Malone to defend me."

For the first time, Malone hoped the case would go before a jury. He could use the publicity. And he could wear that hand-painted necktie.

Malone tossed the thousand-dollar check on Maggie's desk and said, "Deposit this fast. Draw some checks. Pay the office rent, your back salary, the liquor store on Clark Street, my hotel bill, save a hundred for me, and get Rico di Angelo on the phone, fast."

Maggie looked at the check, picked up the phone, dialed, and began singing, "I wish I had died in my cradle — before I grew up to meet you:" Pause. "Mr. Rico di Angelo, please. Mr. Malone calling." She put her hand over the mouthpiece and said, "Eddie Carter's in the office. I know I should have made him wait out here, but he seemed to be in such a state — Thank you. Just a minute, please."

Malone whispered, "What does Carter want?"

"He either wants to kiss you or kill you," Maggie said, "but you'll soon know. Here is Mr. Malone. Thank you for waiting."

"Rico," Malone said, "How many flowers for a fine funeral can I get for 32 bucks —"

Eddie Carter looked about as unhappy as a man can get, and still live. He lifted his face from his hands as Malone walked in. The face, Malone decided, was an interesting combination of drawn and haggard. The word for it might be draggard. Or, maybe, hawn.

"Look here, Malone," the gambler said, "I ain't a guy which apologizes easy, but I gotta apologize to you, see. So here I am."

"Apologize to me?" Malone said easily. "For what? Have you insulted me when I wasn't looking?" Draggard was the word, he decided. "Eddie, I think you can use a drink." He pulled open the filing cabinet drawer marked *EMERGENCY* and pulled out an almost-full pint of gin. He found an almost-clean glass, filled it halfway to the top, and handed it over.

"T'anks," Eddie Carter said. The gin went down fast. "And what's more, Malone, I ain't a guy what says t'anks easy, either." He lit a cigarette on the second try, and said, "Okay, I've apologized, and here's the check back. I shouldn't a'acted that way but I guess I was upset, kind of."

Malone said, "Forget it, Eddie." He tore the check into sixteen pieces and dropped it into the wastebasket. "Now we're even." He poured another five inches of gin into Eddie Carter's glass and said, "Tell me about Mona Trent."

"She's dead," the gambler said tonelessly. He downed his drink and said, "When a person's dead, a person's dead, and there's nothing another person can do but send flowers, see?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Malone nodded, and wondered if Eddie Carter's floral offering would outdo the blanket of orchids he had managed for $32.

"What I mean is," Eddie Carter said, "I wasn't sore at Mona, see? She figgered she could do better, that's okay by me. Only, unnerstan', I wanna make sure this society bum is treatin' her right, and that's how come I had Louie keep'n eye on her. I guess he must of been, or Louie would of told me."

Malone found another glass and expertly divided the remaining gin. The two men were silent for a moment. It was, after all, a very private and personal wake.

"But jealous!" Eddie said suddenly. "Jeez. Everybody was jealous. This society bum, he's so jealous of Mona, he lives right across the alley from her so's he can watch t'rough d'windows and make sure she don't have no boy frien's. N' d'society bum's wife, she's so jealous of d'bum, he don't dare take no chance on visitin' Mona till d'wife goes to sleep." He grinned at Malone. "Louie, he gets around."

The unhappy mood dropped from him abruptly. "Say, Malone, d'pictures come out swell." He began unfolding the collection he had under his arm.

The pictures had, indeed, come out swell. Eddie Carter, bereaved lover, was the very image of tragedy. The interviews had turned out even better. An inspired Buddy McHugh had translated Eddie's last line into "Even if I'd wanted to kill her, something would have stopped me at the last minute. Because I always loved her."

Eddie Carter rose, tucked the newspapers under his arm, and said, "I a'ready ordered twenty copies a' everyt'ing. Malone, I'm sorry you wouldn' take d'check."

Malone was sorry too. He made a fast mental resolution about momentary impulses and generous gestures.

At the door, Eddie Carter paused and said, "Say, come up to d'joint some night, Malone."

Malone sat brooding for a long time after Eddie had gone. He was still brooding when Maggie came in with the last editions.

"A nice day's work," she commented. 'All in twenty-four hours you get three clients. One's dead, one's free, and one's in jail. Here's your hundred bucks, and I must say, Mrs. Cartwright looks very nice."

The papers had done even better by Leonora Cartwright than they had by Eddie Carter. The sad, sweet smile had come through beautifully. And the *News*, the *Times* and the *Herald-American* had used her line, "I'm very fortunate in having John J. Malone for a lawyer."

"One more like that," Malone said, "and the world will be bringing mousetraps to our door." He scowled. "There's something wrong, Maggie. It must have happened that way, but—" He paused, reached for a cigar, and said, "Blast it, there's just one thing that's important, and I've forgotten what it is."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Maybe," Maggie snapped, "it's to get a shave and change your shirt." Her eyes softened. "Or get a good night's sleep."

Malone ignored her. He rose, stuffed the ten $10 bills in his pocket, and headed for the door.

"Maggie, where can I find an Almanac?"

"Try the public library," Maggie said.

"Thanks," Malone said. "You can close up the office and go home. I'm going to the library, and then to see Paul Cartwright."

The Cartwright apartment was an interior decorator's dream of Paradise. It had been so obviously designed around Paul Cartwright's personality that Malone expected a maddened leopard to come charging through the underbrush at any moment.

"Nice, isn't it," Paul Cartwright said. "That's an elephant gun on the wall, just to your left. Scotch?"

Malone winced, glanced over his left shoulder, and said, "Yes, thanks." He wondered how the scotch was going to co-ordinate with the bourbon, beer, and gin he'd been using for the past twenty-four hours. He looked across the room and what he assumed was the head of a sabre-toothed tiger leered at him.

"Got that one in India," Paul Cartwright said. "Water or soda? Right. Village natives asked me to get him. Killer, he was."

Malone deliberately avoided looking around the room. He expected any minute to see the carefully mounted head of a Tibetan Lama.

"Don't misunderstand me," Paul Cartwright said. "I am not a hunter by trade. I shot that tiger because it had killed twenty-two natives in less than a month. I do not condone the killing of any living thing for sport. Only from necessity. Our trips — Mrs. Cartwright always came with me — were not big-game hunting expeditions; they were scientific explorations, made possible through the generosity of Leonora's father. Naturally, one does not take chances."

"Just as your wife —" Malone began. He stopped suddenly.

Paul Cartwright hid his face in his hands for a moment, then he looked up and met Malone's eyes. "It *was* an accident. You *will* be able to — get her off?"

Malone said, for the third time, "I've never lost a client yet."

The answering smile was forced, and a little grim. "I'll never forgive myself. Another scotch? Good. Mr. Malone, I'm going to tell you the truth. I was mad about Mona. You can understand something like that."

"You're damned right I can," Malone said fervently, thinking of the blanket of orchids. He tinkled the ice in his glass. It made a lovely sound. He wondered why some great composer didn't write it into a symphony. "How long were you married to her?"

"Oh. Oh, of course, you know that, too. It was less than a month. We were both poor. I had a chance to go

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

along on an expedition to Upper Mongolia. She had a chance to go into the chorus of a Broadway show. We parted friends." He grimaced. "I don't need to tell you how lovely she was then — and always."

"You don't," Malone said.

"It isn't true that she ever tried to blackmail me. It turned out that the Mexican divorce she got wasn't valid. But that wasn't what mattered. The minute I saw her again —"

Paul Cartwright paused, gulped down his scotch, and said, "It's true, I insisted on our taking this apartment because it was near hers. It's true that I was insanely jealous, that I watched her through the windows to make sure there wasn't another man in her life. And somehow, Leonora — well, Leonora is a jealous person too. But she wouldn't have — it was an accident, Mr. Malone, wasn't it? Besides, Leonora is a very bad shot."

Malone rose, strolled over to the windows. The two apartments were separated by the average-sized alley. Through the window, he could see the chair where Mona Trent had been found dead.

"Accidents happen in the best of murders," he told Paul Cartwright consolingly. "And thanks for the scotch."

He wasn't quite sure why he wanted to see Mona Trent's apartment again. It was that something — the something he couldn't quite remember. He hoped that the imitation French maid would be there to let him in. She was.

This time, she didn't even bother with the accent.

"Hello, Mr. Malone. They told me I could come in and clean up the place. I still have three days' pay coming, so I thought I'd earn it."

"Give me a towel and I'll help wipe the dishes," Malone said. "Where did you get that phony French accent, and is your name really Yvette?"

"The dishes are wiped," she told him. "I got the French accent at a dramatic school in Hollywood, my name is really Gertrude Hutchins, I want to be an actress, and do you drink anything?"

"Yes," Malone said, "anything."

While she went into the kitchen, Malone prowled around the room. There was something wrong, and he didn't know just what it was.

The drinks were wonderful. Cool and frosted, and long.

"You're going to go far in this world," Malone said. "Now tell me the story of your life."

Five minutes later she said, coyly, "Hadn't we better pull down the window shades?"

Malone murmured, "Um-hm."

Shades! That was it! He looked at them, sprang to his feet. "Yvette. Gertie. Trudy. Whatever your name is. What time did you leave here last night?"

She stared at him. "Just after Miss Trent came home."

"Were the shades drawn?"

"No. Mr. Cartwright — I guess

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you know all that. She said she was going to sit at the open window and watch for the signal he always makes when he's on his way over. Mr. Malone, what was the name of that Hollywood producer you mentioned?"

"Never mind," Malone said, "I'll get in touch with him."

"I know what I'm doing," Malone said hoarsely into the telephone. "Just pick him up on suspicion of murder. Confront him with all the details I've given you. You'll get a confession. No, I'm not out of my mind! Okay, I'll meet you later in Joe the Angel's."

"It was the window shades," Malone said to von Flanagan, hours later.

Von Flanagan sighed, and said, "Okay, Cartwright confessed. But what's all this about window shades?"

"According to Cartwright's story," Malone said, "he waited until Mrs. Cartwright was in a drugged sleep. Then he went to visit Mona. Naturally, they pulled down the shades. Some time later, he went home. Mrs. Cartwright was suffering from the kind of insomnia that follows a heavy dose of sleeping pills. She shot at a bird, and killed a pigeon."

The little lawyer went on, wearily, "Except, there should have been a bullet hole in the window shade. There was a neat little hole in the window glass, but none in the shade."

"Now, Cartwright's confession," von Flanagan muttered. He waved at Joe the Angel for another beer. "He says he waited until there was a noisy party next door, and took advantage of it to shoot Mona Trent. The noise would cover the sound of the shot. After he'd killed her, he went next door and pulled down the shades, so that curious neighbors wouldn't look in the window and see the dead body. At dawn, he encouraged his wife to shoot at birds."

"It's a nice confession," Malone said. "Now go back to your office and dictate it, and get Paul Cartwright to sign it. As his lawyer, I'll repudiate it in court and swear it was signed under duress."

Von Flanagan muttered something unpleasant, and left. The little lawyer sat at the bar, humming, "I wish I had died in my cradle."

After a while he walked out into the rain and hailed a cab.

"It was very kind of you to bring me home," Leonora Cartwright said. "But I just don't think I can stay here overnight. If you'll wait until I pack a few things —"

"I'll wait," Malone said," until you pack whatever you'll need in jail. You've got to confess sooner or later, you know. And you can't let your husband sit in a damp little cell overnight, when it was really you who killed Mona Trent — and not by accident."

His skin felt as cold as the skin of a recently caught fish. He was bluffing, and he didn't think he was going to get away with it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She flew at him in a fury.

"It was pure jealousy," Malone said, between her outbursts. He wondered where nice women learned such words. "The word 'jealousy' is the theme song of this act, and I should have caught on to it much earlier. Paul married you because your father was a multi-millionaire, and would finance his expeditions. You knew that, but you didn't know that he was genuinely fond of you, and would have protected you with his life — as he's doing now."

He paused long enough to light a cigar and said, "Shut up, dear, I'm talking. You hated Mona Trent, perhaps with good reason, and you decided to kill her. Now don't tell me a woman who has traveled round the world with Paul Cartwright on hunting expeditions doesn't know how to handle a .22 caliber rifle. And there's nothing wrong with your eyesight, and frankly, I don't believe you take sleeping pills. You shot Mona Trent, and your husband knew it, and being the kind of guy he is, he tried to cover up for you."

He looked at her. The smile was there; the faint, sad, wistful little smile. "How did you know?"

Malone paused, relit his cigar, and said, "Something kept bothering me. Presumably this 'accident' took place at dawn, or shortly thereafter, according to your statement. But when Mona Trent was found dead, the lights were on, full blast, in her apartment. People don't usually leave the lights on with a sunrise coming through the window, unless they happen to be dead."

Malone tossed away his match and reflected, that was a nice line.

"But really," Malone said, "the birds told me. Not because they sang, but because they *didn't* sing."

"Go on," Leonora Cartwright whispered.

"You see," he went on, wishing with all his heart it weren't true, "you overlooked something. You said that the birds sang at dawn. But Mona Trent was killed at 5 in the morning, and according to the Almanac, the sun rose at exactly 7:12 A.M. No self-respecting bird would be yelping when it was still as dark as the floor of a coal cellar." He added, "If it did, it deserved to be shot at."

"That *was* stupid of me, wasn't it?" Leonora Cartwright said.

She rose, slipped on her coat with a graceful gesture that all but broke Malone's heart, and said, "You're quite right. I shot her through the open window, while Paul was on his way to her apartment. He knew. He pulled down the window shades. He made up a story for me. He —" She sighed, softly. "Shall we go?"

At the door, she paused for one moment. "You *will* defend me in court, Mr. Malone?"

"You're damned right I will!" said Malone fervently.

A bad-tempered dawn was crawling up from the other side of Lake Michigan. In the nearby trees, birds were beginning to sing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A MATTER OF TIMING

by VICTOR CANNING

YOU COULD TELL IT WAS COMING. The touch, the hard-luck story . . . and because my own glass was full and his empty, my own suit reasonably respectable and his unreasonably shabby, I was sorry for him. Not that that stopped me from cursing myself for being a soft-hearted so-and-so who ought to be tighter with his wallet. But there it is. A man's always wondering at such times if he may not come to it himself. Twenty more years and I would have reached his 60-odd, and a lot can happen in twenty years.

He edged along the seat a little and leaned across the table. From his waistcoat pocket he pulled out a watch and laid it between us. It was a good watch, silver, and with those finely wrought gold hands that they don't put on watches these days.

"It's yours for a couple of quid. Nothing wrong with it, and honestly come by."

You could tell he was an old hand at the game by the way he ignored the preliminaries and came right to the heart of the problem at once. His voice, too, had that half-belligerent quality which some of them have, the ones who never get used to being on the wrong end of charity.

"I don't want it," I said, but because a man's money is his own and he's entitled to be a damned fool with it at times, I passed over a tenbob note as I pushed the watch back to him. While he was recovering from the shock I ordered a beer and a ham sandwich for him from the bar.

"I'd rather you bought the watch square," he said, after the attendant had served him.

"Forget it," I said.

He took a sip of beer to help him, but it had the opposite effect.

"I hate the sight of watches," he said suddenly, like a man remembering with a start something he'd forgotten. "They started it all."

"All what?"

"This." He flicked his hand across the front of his shabby suit.

I had half an hour to spare before an appointment and it was raining outside. He had me and, from the slick way he slid into his routine, I knew there was going to be no escape.

"Chris Selby was his name," the old man said. "A London theatrical agent, handled quite a few head-of-the-bill names and a great many more nearly as good. Yes, he was doing very well for himself, was Chris Selby, but he could never resist the temptation to do a little better — even if it meant going outside his own line of business."

He went into the story easily and you could tell he had had a lot of practice, which just shows that there must be plenty of soft-hearted so-and-sos in the world who are ready

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to part with ten bob for a story and the chance to make themselves feel a little more Christian than they really are. . . .

The whole thing took place just after the first World War. A long time ago, but there are a lot of people who still remember it and who think the 'twenties was a pretty good period to live in. This Chris Selby, it seems, was a Prince Charming with a smile that came off and on like summer lightning, a voice like butter and eggs when he wanted something from you, and poison if you got in the way of his 15 per cent. But on the whole few people did get in his way, and most people liked him because they didn't really know him.

He used to make five or six trips a year to Paris on business, picking up acts and vaudeville turns, trying out his smile on the Champs Élysées, and never feeling lonely in the evenings or having to count his francs to see if he had enough for another *pernod*. Twice a year he would take his car over. My friend with the watch didn't say what kind of car it was, but you can imagine — and I'll bet there was hell to pay with the garage hands if they left oily fingermarks over the wheel and dirty lumps of rag in the side pockets. He always went over Dover to Calais and back that way, and most of the Customs boys knew him and liked him because on a ten-minute acquaintance five or six times a year he was the kind of man anyone would like, and also he was generous with complimentary tickets for London shows. He never had any trouble with the Customs, and the truth was that, except for the two car trips each year, there was never any need for trouble because he never tried to get away with anything. But when the car went over — that was different. Twice a year he would bring back about 5000 watches at a time.

I know it sounds a lot, but it's surprising how many watches you can pack into a car, particularly if your twelve-gallon tank only holds two gallons of gasoline and the rest watches, and the floor of the car is false. Of course, it means filling up with gasoline pretty often on the run, but no one minds that if the gross profit on each trip touches the thousand-pound mark.

If you or I tried anything like that we'd be as nervous as kittens with a duck for a foster-mother and probably give ourselves away. But not Chris Selby. A theatrical agency is pretty good training in putting up a front. He never felt nervous and he knew his stuff. The Customs boys seldom give a car a rummage unless they've had a tip-off or one of their investigators had picked up a lead. Of course, anyone taking a car over too often drops in for it sometime, tip-off or no tip-off. But a man going over twice a year, November and July, on legitimate business and with the high-powered personality of Chris Selby had nothing to worry about.

Now this November in question,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Selby set off from London feeling pretty angry. He wasn't nervous or worried about the watches he was going to bring back — he was just looking forward to seeing the man who supplied him with them in Paris — a Monsieur Audiat and his four brothers. There had been certain aspects of the batch he'd taken back the previous July which had annoyed him and made the trip less profitable than it should have been. However, as he drove into the sheds at Dover he showed none of this. He put on his act, handed out a bunch of complimentaries for a new show in town, and in a couple of hours was driving out of Calais on the Paris road.

In Paris he put up at the Hotel Balzac and that evening he went round to see his supplier. Monsieur Audiat was a modest little jeweler at the bottom of the Avenue Wagram. Monsieur Audiat — one never took any notice of the brothers who hung about in the background and were almost half-witted — was careful as well as modest. Chris Selby was his only customer for this kind of work, and he was content with a regular twice-a-year profit rather than more constant business with the consequent risk of publicity.

The day before Chris Selby was due to go home he would leave his car overnight in the garage at the back of the Audiat shop and the half-witted Audiat brothers would have the watches all packed away in the car by the morning.

Chris Selby found Audiat and his brothers at the back of the shop and, without wasting any time on polite inquiries as to their health and with the smile turned off and the butter in the voice gone rancid, he let them have it. A thousand of the last batch of watches had been duds, most of the others hadn't come up to specifications, and the whole lot had been so badly packed into the car that many of them had been broken. He embroidered on this theme for about fifteen minutes, slipping in frequent references to the personalities of Audiat and his brothers, their parents, and the general nature of the French as a whole. It was the kind of performance he was rather good at. In the end Audiat could have stuck a knife into Selby's heart gladly — if it hadn't been for the fact that no Frenchman willingly destroys the source of a nice little profit — and even the half-witted brothers got the idea that the *Anglais* was angry because he hadn't had watches that not only worked well but looked good. However, Audiat finally explained that the batch of watches had been bought by him from Switzerland and he had had them packed unexamined in the car. When things quieted down he promised that there should be no trouble with the next batch which was arriving the following day.

But the next day the watches hadn't arrived. Nor the morning of the next day after that, when Selby drove his car round. Now Selby had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hoped the watches would arrive that morning so they would be packed in time for him to make Calais for the last ferry. He wanted to be in London the following day for a new show which was opening in which he had an interest. To show how he felt about things, Selby examined the genealogy of the Audiat family again and swore that if the watches didn't come in time he'd take his business elsewhere.

Well, he spent the day clearing up a little unfinished business with a fan-and-dove dancer whom he felt he could promote professionally and privately in London, and in between, telephoning Audiat to see if the watches had come in. In the afternoon he learned that the watches had just arrived. He left the dancer to feed her doves and whipped around to Audiat. He told him exactly how he wanted the watches packed and Audiat promised that his brothers should examine them all and see that there were no duds and that the car could be picked up at four in the morning, which would give Selby time to drive to Calais and make the early morning ferry. He'd be in London after lunch and make his new show in the evening. It meant Selby wouldn't get much sleep that evening, but he was used to that and he would have the cooing of the doves to rouse him if he overslept.

Just after four in the morning he was away, singing to himself, driving fast and practising his smile on the women at the level-crossing gates. When it was a matter of practice he didn't mind what kind of woman it was. At Calais it was a raw cold morning and he had no trouble with the *douane*. He saw his car aboard and then went down to the bar, had coffee laced with brandy, and then dozed for an hour.

At Dover he went ashore and saw his cases through, telling the officer who was examining them not to be surprised if he shook any feathers out of his pajamas, because he had just booked up a fan-and-dove dancer. Then he went over to clear his car.

The Customs officer on the car was one he knew well, a man of about his own age. He gave him the big smile, cracked the feathers joke again, and answered the usual questions. Everything went well — the smile, the joke, the easy manner, and the promise of a free seat at the new show if the officer liked to write and remind him some time.

He'd got the all-clear signal and had his hand on the car door, about to get in and drive off, when all over the place — which had been the usual pandemonium of customs clearing — there was a mad wail of sirens for a few seconds, and then everything stopped. Chris Selby didn't have to be told what it was. In those days the first World War wasn't far behind, and when the sirens went at eleven o'clock on the morning of November 11 — Armistice Day — everybody stopped and there was silence for two minutes. There really was silence. Even the sea-gulls stopped bawling

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their heads off. Chris Selby and the officer stood by the car like a couple of wax figures, and you could have heard a pin drop.

No one did drop a pin, but Chris and the officer heard something else. From the car — not loud enough for anyone else to hear, it's true, but loud enough to do the damage — came the gentle sound of 5000 watches ticking off, all carefully wound by the half-witted Audiat brothers who wanted to please the *Anglais* by making sure that he had watches that not only went well but looked good. . . .

It was here that my friend stopped his story to finish his ham sandwich and beer. I'd had my ten bob's worth all right, but there's always something that drives a man on to get a little more for his money; so I said:

"Now tell me that you're Chris Selby and maybe I'll buy the watch for a couple of quid."

But the old boy shook his head. "Selby died nine years ago. No, I'm the Customs officer. With his smile and his ten-minute charm he talked me into a partnership and two years later we were both caught."

"Q"

FOR MYSTERY FANS — these swiftly-paced mystery-thrillers, all MERCURY PUBLICATIONS, are now on sale at your newsstand:

A MERCURY MYSTERY — "Fish and Kill" (formerly "Cork on the Water"), by Macdonald Hastings. Abridged edition. "Fine suspense . . . vivid action. Very good," says *The Saturday Review*.

BESTSELLER MYSTERY — "Alias Basil Willing," by Helen McCloy. ". . . shocking . . . most satisfying . . ." comments the Los Angeles *Herald Express*.

A JONATHAN PRESS MYSTERY — "The Blue Ice," by Hammond Innes. Abridged edition. "Excellent . . . Don't miss it," lauds *The Saturday Review*.

A NEW MERCURY PUBLICATION — in addition to ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE, FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, and the volumes listed above — is TRUE CRIME DETECTIVE. TRUE CRIME DETECTIVE represents a fresh and different approach to the true crime field. Look for it on your newsstand.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE INSPECTOR HAD A WIFE

by CHARLES B. CHILD

CHAFIK J. CHAFIK, OF THE BAGHDAD Criminal Investigation Department, sat at the dining-room table in his modest house at the corner of Nathir-al-Ni'am Street and the Karradat Miriam. He was informally clad in a wide-sleeved, angle-length gown of brown silk, opened at the neck to catch the breezes from the Tigris. The late evening meal had been cleared, and he was engaged in detecting philatelic forgeries.

He announced, as he lifted a stamp with a pair of tweezers, "A Bermuda 'Perot.' It would be valued at 400 dinars if genuine. But it is an excellent copy by a Swiss craftsman, and therefore worthless." The Inspector looked at the dark woman who stood at the window intently watching the moonlit street. "You are not thrilled by this addition to my collection, Leila," he complained.

Madame Chafik said tartly, "When you find a stamp worth 400 dinars I will be thrilled."

"My hobby is relaxing," her husband defended himself. "It is also more dignified than your pastime of observing our neighbors. You were pleased to see Madame Dejani return by boat a few minutes go?"

His wife turned quickly. "Now you mock me. How do you know what goes on when you cannot see?"

The Inspector lighted a cigarette with irritating care. "I observed you look toward the river, where there is a landing for boats. Then you retired behind the curtains, which you would not have done if the person you watched had walked on the other side of the street. Finally you contorted yourself to peer in the direction of our neighbor's front door. You had already informed me that Mr. Dejani had gone away, and that his wife had accompanied him to the train. So it was simplicity itself."

Leila said, "He must have taken the Basra train. It was after 6 when the taxi came. There was only one suitcase, so I knew she wasn't making the journey with him."

"Your reasoning has merit. But are you sure Madame Dejani has now returned? May I know how you penetrated the shroud of outdoor robe which makes the women of Baghdad resemble animated corpses?"

"The passenger from the boat entered the Dejani home with a key. Who else could it have been if not our neighbor? You are foolish."

"I am still not satisfied." Chafik twinkled with mischief. "The railroad station is on this side of the river, and yet this person came back across the river."

"That is strange," admitted Leila, and brightened with new curiosity. "What has she been doing all this

Copyright, 1948, by Charles B. Child

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

time? It is now nearly 9:30, and the Basra train left at 7. Where did she go? Who —"

"Give me peace," said Chafik. "Such questions remind me of my unfortunate profession —"

"It puzzles me, too, why a woman of character should be devoted to a man who neglects her for an English adventuress —"

"Wife, wife!" said the little man in a shocked voice. "How do you know about Miss Violet Shaw?"

Leila answered evasively, "But it is known to all the ladies in the neighborhood. And once when I was visiting our cousin in the Alwiyah district, I saw Mr. Dejani driving in a carriage with a shameless foreign woman. I asked our cousin, and she then told me —"

"Enough! You hold dossiers as complete as my own at headquarters. I have now lost all interest in my hobby." The Inspector closed the stamp album and stood up, a slight figure, strangely dignified in the long robe. "I do not keep a mistress myself," he said. "If I did I would be more discreet. This Violet Shaw, who is actually a Eurasian from Bombay, is indeed an adventuress. Mr. Dejani is not a wealthy man, and her extravagances are leading him into difficulties."

"They dine almost nightly at the Zia Hotel and —"

Leila's new disclosures were interrupted by the telephone bell. Chafik's heelless slippers made a sad shuffle on the polished floor as he went to the bedroom. He took the instrument between finger and thumb.

A familiar voice said, "Sir?"

The little man lifted an eyebrow at his wife, who had followed him. He said with resignation into the telephone, "Speak." A few minutes later he said, "I come," and returned the instrument to its bedside stand. "That was, of course, my dour but admirable assistant, Sergeant Abdullah. There was a note of satisfaction in his voice. He announced a corpse."

"Murder?"

"He would not disturb me otherwise." Inspector Chafik began to dress quickly but carefully. "The corpse," he said casually, as he adjusted his polka-dot tie, "is labeled 'Violet Shaw' —"

The body was in a half-kneeling position on the floor; the head and shoulders and outflung arm rested across a divan, which was upholstered in black and scattered with orange-colored cushions. The woman had been wearing a canary-yellow wrapper and red slippers.

She had tried to accentuate her English features by fluffing out her straight black hair, and by using a light powder on her faintly dusky cheeks. But her figure, which was seductive, had been inherited from a Hindu mother and could not be disguised.

Inspector Chafik, who stood in the doorway, said, "Poor Miss Shaw! What was the cause of death?"

"Sir, she has been dealt several

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heavy blows on the left side of the head. The weapon, which I have not located, was a blunt instrument."

Chafik went to the body and raised the head to examine the wound. "This is indeed ugly. The object had a round, beveled edge." He looked around the room and then bent over a table at the end of the divan. "There is dust," he said. "Observe. Abdullah, something with a round base, perhaps a lamp, stood here recently. Possibly the weapon we seek."

"Shall I make inquiries, sir, for a person seen leaving carrying a bulky object?"

"It is extremely unlikely the murderer was observed. The house is discreetly isolated; there are no neighbors to watch the coming and going of visitors." The Inspector placed his hand under the armpit of the corpse. "There is still warmth, but bodies do not cool quickly in the heat of Baghdad. The woman may have been dead some hours. I note she met death in an angry mood."

"Sir?"

"You can see for yourself," Chafik said sharply. "There is ash scattered over the divan and carpet. She constantly flicked her cigarette, as a person does when irritated!" He took a clean handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his hands. "Miss Violet did not keep a servant in the house. Who, then, found her body?"

Sergeant Abdullah produced a notebook and read in a harsh voice, "The following is the statement of Mr. Daoud Shuman. Quote. 'At about 8:20 tonight I was walking on the Alwiyah water front in the company of my friend, Ahmed Faris, when I saw a lady resembling Miss Violet Shaw, who is well-known to me. I was surprised, because she had previously broken an appointment with me, pleading a headache —' "

Chafik interrupted. "Briefly, what did Mr. Shuman do?"

"Sir, he went to speak to her, but she hurried away and he lost her in the crowd. Then he began to search for her. It would appear he has a suspicious nature. He went to various cafés and bars, but the woman had not been seen. He says. Quote. 'Then I went to the house. The time was about 8:30. After knocking and getting no answer, I opened the door with a key Miss Shaw had previously given me —' "

"This is interesting, Abdullah, for a key was also in the possession of Mr. Dejani. So Mr. Shuman demanded an explanation and was confronted by a corpse. What did he do then?"

"His action was commendable. He telephoned us. He does not appear to realize he is a top suspect."

The Inspector winced. "A detective should arrive at a conclusion only after he has collected facts. Is Mr. Shuman here?"

"I held him incommunicado, awaiting your interrogation, sir."

"Rules and regulations are engraved in letters of gold on your heart! While I talk to the gentleman, kindly inquire if my neighbor, Mr. Mohammed Dejani, was a passenger

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on the Basra train tonight. Secondly, I wish to see the boatman who took a lady across the river and landed her at Nathir-al-Ni'am Street shortly before 9:30. Now bring me Mr. Shuman."

"Here, sir?" The sergeant looked meaningly at the corpse.

"We shall not disturb Miss Violet. And witnesses are less inclined to lie in the presence of the dead."

When his assistant had gone, Chafik went to the window and parted the draperies, which were closely drawn. The room was airless. He looked out on the shadowy plumes of date palms and the pink night sky of the city, and noted again the seclusion of the house. It was surrounded by uncultivated land, and a winding path led through clumps of neglected palms to Mamoun Avenue. "There are no neighbors within clear sight. The path permits secretive approaches and departures," Chafik said in a flat voice.

The drawn curtains worried him. It was the custom in Baghdad to shade windows against the fierce heat of the day, and open up everything at sundown to catch the breezes. "There is something abnormal here —" he announced in the flat voice, as the door opened and a fat young man was ushered into the room. "Did Miss Violet always keep her curtains closed, Mr. Shuman?" he asked.

"Only when the sun was strong. She often opened them before the proper time. The English like air." The young man looked with horror at the body on the divan. "I insist —"

"My position as investigating officer," said Chafik, "puts me in the unique position of doing all the insisting." His thin face suddenly hardened, and he went on in a voice like a blade, "How long had Violet Shaw been your mistress?"

Shuman flushed. "You treat me without courtesy."

"I am here to solve a crime. I have no time to be nice to you." The Inspector balanced himself on his toes like a boxer. "When did you first meet Miss Shaw?"

"Two weeks ago."

"You knew she had been the mistress of Mohammed Dejani?"

"I knew there was another man," Shuman said. "She needed protection and turned to me."

"Such women as Miss Violet," said Chafik softly, "prefer the protection of a man who is foolish and still rich, to that of a man who is still foolish but not rich. Doubtless you insisted she should not see Mr. Dejani again."

"She gave me her promise —"

"And that was why you were suspicious when you saw her on the waterfront tonight?"

The young man interlaced his pudgy fingers. "Naturally I was surprised. I had expected to meet her tonight, but she telephoned about 5 o'clock to say she had a violent headache and could not go out."

"You state you saw the lady at 8:20. Was she far from you?"

"On the opposite side of the road, near the Lido Café —"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You recognized her face?"

Shuman hesitated. "I knew her by her dress."

"I am pleased with your answer." Chafik made a little bow. "The river promenade is poorly lighted and the moon did not rise until 9 o'clock. It would have been scarcely possible to distinguish faces. Was she unusually dressed?"

"She was always distinctive. Also it would be sufficient to pick her out by reason of the absence of a robe. The English do not hide their charms in the way of our women."

Chafik said, "Let us look for the dress that Miss Violet wore." He went to the bedroom and opened the closets. There were many dresses on the hangers, but Shuman pointed unhesitatingly at one. It was a dazzling print, a pattern of huge orange and blue flowers on a white ground, fussy with cape sleeves and bows.

The Inspector winced. "This is indeed distinctive. What did she wear on her head?"

"A blue kerchief tied under her chin. I had given it to her myself."

"Then you are prepared to swear the lady you saw was Miss Shaw?"

The young man said, "I cannot deny the evidence of my eyes."

Inspector Chafik opened a packet of Ghazi cigarettes. "Please smoke," he said. "It steadies the nerves, and I may have to give you a shock. But first look around and tell me what is missing."

Shuman obeyed. Then he pointed to the table at the head of the divan, and said, "There was something there. A bronze nude fitted with a clock —"

"The clock was doubtless set in the navel. Such an *objet d'art* belongs here." Chafik looked at the garish room with amusement, then turned quickly on the young man. "Miss Violet argued with somebody before she died. That person may have been you."

"She was dead when I came here!"

"I am a weaver," said Chafik. "I use facts as threads. It is a fact you came to this house in a suspicious mood. It is a fact that suspicion is the seed of dissension. Anger may have caused you to seize the statuette with the novelty navel and strike the lady."

"She was already dead —"

"Mr. Shuman, you saw the lady alive at 8:20 and dead at about 8:50. It is a ten-minute walk from the Lido Café to this house. Miss Violet took time to change from her distinctive dress to her equally distinctive wrapper. She was also embroiled in argument with the killer. This person could scarcely have left before you arrived."

"I thought I heard the back door close as I entered —"

"You did not mention this in your statement to my assistant. Amended evidence is open to doubt."

The young man made a babbling sound.

"Please sit," Chafik said, not unkindly. "The design I have shown you is ugly, but you should not be frightened by it. The weave is loose and certain threads have been discarded.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As a craftsman I do not like it. I had expected a different design."

He turned to Sergeant Abdullah, who had just entered. The sergeant announced, "Sir, I have completed the inquiries. The other suspect was a passenger on the train. I have telephoned the police at Hilla to remove him at that junction and return him here."

"Excellent! But it was tactless to say 'other suspect.' Mr. Shuman was already upset. It would be well for him to go home and spend what is left of the night in prayer." When the man had gone stumbling out, Chafik asked Abdullah, "What of the second inquiry?"

"Sir, I have a boatman who took a lady from the Rafidain Wharf and landed her at Nathir-al-Ni'am Street at the hour you foretold. Although she was clad in an enveloping robe, he recognized her by her voice. She was Madame Dejani."

The Inspector turned the signet ring on the little finger of his left hand. "What else did the boatman say?"

"Sir, he said Madame Dejani dropped a bulky object into the river on the way across. He condoned with her on the accident and offered to get his son to dive. She replied that the object had no value, but was obviously upset."

Chafik looked down at the ring. "How very unfortunate Mr. Shuman saw Miss Violet after the train left for Basra!" he announced in a bitter voice.

At noon on the following day, Chafik entered his house on the Street of the Scatterer of Blessings and sank into a chair in the living-room. With the gesture of a man breaking lifetime habits, he pulled down his tie and opened the collar of his shirt.

His wife, who had appeared with a glass of cooling sherbet, knelt to remove his shoes and replace them with slippers. She gave no greeting, and the little man remarked, "Although you are silent your thoughts are noisy."

Leila said, "Your men came and took away Madame Dejani. The face of Sergeant Abdullah was that of a judge. She has been arrested?"

"Detained." Chafik briefly closed his eyes, and when he opened them again they were dark with shadows. "Do you think this gives me pleasure?" he asked. "I am a hunter of men. Sometimes I detest myself so much it surprises me; my body does not shrivel —"

Leila said, "Please, my man, do not speak harshly of yourself. You are just. Without doubt facts forced you to detain our neighbor."

"The facts are a key, a certain bulky object, and the evidence of two witnesses. The key was in the bag of Madame Dejani and fitted the door of Miss Shaw's house. Such a key had been given to Mr. Dejani."

"His wife may have found it and kept it, not knowing what it was."

Chafik said harshly, "She used it last night. I know she took a taxi from the railroad station to Mamoun Ave-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nue, a twenty-five-minute journey. From there it is an average fifteen-minute walk to the house. The place is secluded. There are no neighbors. It can be reached by a path across wasteland. Furthermore, the night was dark until the moon rose and a woman wearing a chuddar would have been as a shadow. But it is established by fact that Mrs. Dejani was there. At approximately ten minutes past 9 she appeared at the Rafidain Wharf, an easy eighteen-minute walk from Miss Shaw's house. She engaged a boatman, and on the way across the river dropped an object into the water. The boatman, who thought it an accident, offered to have it retrieved, but was refused. He remembered the spot, which is where the current swings. We dredged the thing up."

"What was it?"

Chafik raised his clasped hands to his mouth, and looked beyond her with shadowed eyes. "A heavy bronze statue with an inset clock. The base matches the wounds in Miss Shaw's head," he said. "The evidence is damning. We know that Miss Shaw was out until 8:20. She was seen by a witness. When she returned she found Mrs. Dejani. One can understand the conversation between them was not pleasant —"

"Our neighbor is a calm person."

"When a woman becomes jealous she becomes primitive. Madame Jejani afterward fled from the house concealing the weapon under her robe. We have found stains on the inside of the robes. She left by the back door as the witness who found the body entered by the front. I am afraid she is guilty."

"Surely she did not confess?"

"She said nothing. I begged her to defend herself, but she only shook her head. She has a singularly sweet face and great strength of character. How unlike Mr. Dejani."

"He did go to Basra?"

"We took him off the train at Hilla. He is a very weak man. He admits he saw Miss Shaw yesterday and was given his congé. She had taken another lover. When I confronted him with the weapon and the evidence, he wept. I had a desire to beat him."

The little man rose and began to pace the room. "I have woven a pattern with threads of facts, but two threads remain unused. They are frayed. But they are threads." He rearranged the collection of clay animals from Sulaimaniya on the mantel shelf. "Why," he demanded in a hollow voice, "were the curtains drawn in Miss Shaw's room when the evening air would have refreshed it? Why did she change into a wrapper; how was there time since the two women had to talk, and Madame Dejani to commit her deed of violence? This period is barely twenty minutes."

"Why worry yourself about unimportant details?" Leila gave a sly look.

"No detail is unimportant." Her husband spoke sharply. "You should

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

know me, that I must get everything exact." He looked at her suspiciously. "I think you know me quite well," he said dryly.

"Then I will correct you about Madame Dejani." Leila lighted a gold-tipped Egyptian cigarette. "You see her as a woman so jealous of her husband's mistress that she killed her. Yet there had been other mistresses, and they did not rouse this primitive jealousy of which you so glibly speak."

"Glib — I?" Chafik was shocked.

"I have noted," said his wife, looking down her long thin nose, "that men are more prone to insane jealousy than women. Our weakness is an overwillingness to sacrifice ourselves to our men. It is so with Madame Dejani. She has given everything to her husband. When he gambles away his money, she sells her jewels so that he may gamble again. She treats him as a doting mother treats an erring child."

"Almost you make me believe it is not in character for a woman to kill her husband's mistress."

Leila said, "It is not in the character of Madame Dejani." She walked gracefully to the window and rearranged the curtains to cut off a red-hot spear of sunlight. She said over her shoulder, "Your unused fact about the curtains is peculiar. It was so hot last night that nobody would have left them drawn, even in a house not secluded."

The Inspector lifted a hand for silence. He was now hunched in his chair, and although the temperature of the rooms was over 90, he shivered. Presently he announced, "It is unsatisfactory. There are still unused threads."

Leila said nothing.

"If Shuman had not seen Miss Violet —" Chafik began. The sentence was left dangling, and he sat up. His eyes glowed as he fixed them on his wife. "Will you be shameless for a good cause?"

"Shameless?" She was shocked and bewildered.

"I intend to make an experiment." The announcement was made in the voice of a martinet, and Leila thought: now he is the Inspector of the Criminal Investigation Department —

The river boardwalk leading from Saa'dun Square was a pleasant spot on a hot summer's night. The numerous cafés along the Tigris were strung with lights which twinkled like fireflies among the palms.

Near the Lido Café, where the crowd was dense, Inspector Chafik walked with Daoud Shuman. The fat young man resembled a sleeper roused from a bad nightmare. "I still cannot believe it," he said.

Chafik said sympathetically, "It must be a great relief. You were certainly in an unpleasant position."

"I am sorry that Madame Dejani —"

"Let us forget the unfortunate lady." The Inspector made a sweeping gesture. "How pleasant it is after the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heat of the day," he continued. "Baghdad has a certain magic at this hour. It was about here where you saw Miss Violet last night?"

"Just across the road —"

"Excuse me if I again ask you if you are certain it was she."

"Inspector, I could not be more certain. I —" Daoud Shuman came to a halt. The color which had returned to his flabby cheeks drained. His mouth opened. He clutched at his companion's arm and stuttered, "The Merciful One defend us! *I see her* —"

The lights of the nearby café were shaded by the fronds of the palms, which moved in the breeze and sent changing patterns of shadow across the road. A woman, colorful as a butterfly in a dress patterned with blue and orange flowers, came briefly into the light. She wore a bright blue kerchief over her head and walked with a swaying motion of shapely hips. As the shadows flickered, she disappeared.

Shuman shouted, "But she is dead!" He put his hands to his pounding heart, and his fat body wrinkled like the fabric of a collapsing balloon. A man stepped swiftly behind him and gave the support of strong arms.

"Soothe him, my dear Abdullah," said Chafik. "When he recovers from his shock, bring him to my office."

The Inspector parted the gathering crowd with an imperious gesture. A sleek black car slid out of the night, and as he opened the door the woman in the bright, cheap dress scurried across the road. She sat on the back seat of the car and Chafik heard her sob as he joined her.

"The shame of it!" came the voice of his wife. "Oh, to parade in that woman's dress. I feel unclean —"

He took her hand. "May I be forgiven —" he began, humbly.

Leila said, "I am all over blushes. To think I showed myself with face uncovered. The looks of the men made me feel naked." Her imprisoned hand fluttered and then was still. "It was a successful experiment?"

"The new design is complete."

They brought Dejani's wife into the Inspector's office at C.I.D. headquarters on Al-Rashid Street. Madame Chafik, now decently swathed in a chuddar, went to the woman and led her to a chair. A protesting voice outside the room was heard to say, "I demand a doctor. I am ill," and Mr. Dejani entered. He was a tall man, slightly stooped, with a wide, loose mouth and unstill hands.

Daoud Shuman came in propelled by Sergeant Abdullah.

The little man behind the big desk said, "Are you still certain it was Miss Violet you saw on the river promenade last night?"

"I am not sure of anything —"

"With those words you destroy an alibi." Chafik paused. "Tonight you saw a familiar dress. It was worn by my wife. Last night the wearer was Madame Dejani —"

The woman said, "Oh, no, no!"

"In this case," went on Chafik, "I have learned that a devoted woman

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

puts no limit to her sacrifice. Madame Dejani went secretly to the house of Miss Shaw, knowing she would find a corpse. She had a twofold purpose. First, to remove the statuette which was marked with incriminating fingerprints. Secondly, to create an alibi for a worthless man. She knew that the woman, Violet Shaw, habitually walked the river front, so she dressed as that woman and paraded. She is dark as the dead woman was dark, and alike in build. The dusk and her unusual dress made it a good risk. But she did see a friend of Miss Shaw. The shock must have been severe, but she kept her head and avoided Shuman and returned immediately to the house. She arrived at 8:20. I think she collapsed, for twenty minutes was more than ample time to replace the livid dress in the closet for me to find, and to depart with the incriminating weapon. The witness almost caught her."

Madame Dejani made a movement of protest, but the little man looked up and shook his head gently.

"It was intelligently planned. The dress was as distinctive as a uniform; as protective to the identity as a peacock's coloring. We would have found other witnesses than Mr. Shuman to tell us Miss Shaw was seen after the train left for Basra. But he so strengthened the alibi that I accepted it."

Shuman said, "I have been greatly at fault."

"The Inspector was also at fault, but fortunately he had a wife." Chafik made a little bow in the direction of his lady.

"Those threads are now in the design. Miss Shaw, being dead, could not have changed into her wrapper in the presence of Madame Dejani. The curtains were not opened after the heat of the day because she died before the sun went down. She was killed by a man who was jealous because she had taken a richer lover. He acted blindly, without premeditation."

"She was a bad woman," Madame Chafik said.

"One might say he is a bad man. But justice makes allowances for the violence of passion. It is not the killing that disgraces this man, but what comes afterward. He fled in panic to his wife. He told her the sordid story. He hid like a rat while she tried to cover his crime."

Madame Dejani whispered, "He is sick. Have pity!"

"My pity is only for you." Inspector Chafik let his hands fall heavily to the desk. "I am waiting," he went on in a bitter voice. "I cannot believe this man is so degraded that he will still try to hide behind the noble woman who shouldered his crime."

Mohammed Dejani stood up with the jerky movements of a puppet. His wife, rising with him, clutched with both hands, as a mother reaches for a child precariously balanced at the edge of a pit. The man said, "I confess —" but the rest of his words were lost in the terrible wailing of the woman.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The second short story that Roark Bradford ever sold was awarded First Prize by the O. Henry Memorial Committee of 1927; that was the year, you may recall, when Ernest Hemingway's "The Killers" won Second Prize. Roark Bradford's first volume of short stories, OL' MAN ADAM AN' HIS CHILLUN, *became the basis of Marc Connelly's famous play, "The Green Pastures," winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1930. And Mr. Bradford's* JOHN HENRY, *published in 1931, was a choice of the Literary Guild . . . In the story by Roark Bradford which we now offer, you will meet Uncle Billy Williams, who used to be sheriff of El Paso county 'way back in the '80s, and whose only weapons against a modern outlaw are his old Frontier .45 and his old steel-gray eyes . . .*

THE SHERIFF DECIDES

by ROARK BRADFORD

THE SECRETARY IMPERSONALLY told Uncle Billy to be seated while she took his name into the inner office. But Uncle Billy preferred to stand by the window. It was the first time he had seen El Paso from a fourteen-story height and he was impressed.

"She's all spraddled out," he commented.

Then he smiled grimly. When the people of El Paso county elected him sheriff, back in the 'eighties, the prediction was that he would have to kill the whole MacNash gang in order to bring the law back to the community.

"Only had to kill one of 'em, by grabs," he said to himself. "Odie. The rest o' the herd come to jail peaceable as lambs."

He looked out and saw the jail a few blocks away. But it was not the old adobe jail into which he had locked five outlaw MacNash brothers. It was a brand-new one built of concrete and steel on top of the new six-story courthouse on the Isleta Road. They called it Texas Street, now. They called the sheriff by a different name too — they called him Jim Fox. But Uncle Billy called him Sonny, just as he had ever since Uncle Billy had ridden the youngster on the front of his saddle.

Yes, sir, El Paso had changed considerable in the past fifty years.

"Mr. Bellinger will see you now," the secretary announced.

Uncle Billy went in and stood before the lawyer's desk. He fumbled in his coat pocket and presently drew forth an official-looking document.

"Now, Bub," said Uncle Billy pleasantly, "I come about this paper."

Copyright, 1935, by M. R. Bradford

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The lawyer did not look at the paper. "That," he said, "is a formal notice of foreclosure."

"Well," Uncle Billy said hesitantly, "it wasn't so much about the paper itself. What I really come to ask you, mostly, was, is this here foreclosure and all strictly legal?"

"Absolutely." The lawyer was crisp and positive.

Uncle Billy looked out of the window for a moment. "I'm right sorry about that," he stated.

The lawyer stared cold-eyed at the old man and said nothing.

"Not, understand," continued Uncle, "but ary one of my four darters wouldn't be glad to take us in. But I been makin' my own livin' so long, I sort of hate to break a new trail, at my age. I'm eighty-four, now."

The lawyer yawned.

"I jest figgered," Uncle Billy chuckled, "if I could strike oil and get rich, I might be able to help Ed out some. He's Abbie's husband, you know. He's back east in Fort Worth, in the cattle business, Ed is, and things ain't goin' so good, I understand. Not that Ed ain't makin' a good livin'. He is. But I jest thought it would be nice —"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said the lawyer. "All I know is, you put up your ranch as security for the expense of promoting an oil boom in the lower valley and the promotion corporation accepted a thirty-thousand valuation on your holdings, when the place was not worth more than half that much."

"Yep," said Uncle Billy, "I mind all of that. And the holding corporation and the operating corporation and one or two other off-brand outfits that you organized used up the capital in legal fees to yourself. In other words, Bub, you jest rooked me out of my ranch."

"Put it any way you like," snapped the lawyer. "That notice is legal and unless you can have my receipt before the expiration of fifteen days, your ranch will be sold. Legally."

"That's bad," said Uncle Billy. "I hoped it 'twant legal, least not all."

He fumbled again through his pockets. This time he drew out a pistol, an old Frontier Model weapon. He began feeding .45 caliber cartridges into it. "Because," he was saying quietly, "I've got to kill you, now."

The lawyer did not move.

"I ain't killed a man since '88," Uncle Billy said casually, "and I'll tell you, it ain't any pleasure to take human life. But you rooked me out of my ranch, so I've got to kill you."

In one quick moment the lawyer understood why Sheriff Billy Williams had had to kill only one of the outlaw MacNash gang, back in the 'eighties. The calm, almost gentle voice, the frank steel-gray eyes, and the round muzzle of that pistol were enough to sap the courage of a man.

"I'll give you a receipt for the whole thing," the lawyer said. He was not hysterical, nor even particularly afraid. He had come to a decision.

"I'm right sorry, Bub." Uncle

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Billy's voice was as quiet as ever except that now there seemed to be a note of genuine sorrow in it. "I reckon it's too late for that kind of a deal, now. If I let you give me a receipt, it would sort of be under duress, like, and it wouldn't hold water when I went to have it recorded to cancel off the mortgage. All you'd have to do is jest telephone Sonny Fox and tell him I was up here threatening you with a gun, which I shorely am. Then the receipt wouldn't be worth shucks, and Sonny would have to put me under peace bond. Nope, Bub, I reckon it's too late for a play like that. And I'm right sorry. But a citizen owes it to the community and to his self-respect to keep the atmosphere pure."

"Cold-blooded, premeditated murder," said the lawyer. "And you'll swing at the end of a rope."

"Guessed wrong," said Uncle Billy. "There's two ca'tridges in this gun. One for you and then one for me."

"There is no use killing me," the lawyer said. "I'll give you a receipt and I promise not to protest it."

"Your promise," said Uncle Billy, "ain't worth no more'n a receipt taken at the point of a gun, Bub."

The lawyer pleaded for five minutes. He tried every trick he had ever used before a jury and in return got only that cold impersonal look.

Presently, in the midst of his plea, he heard Uncle Billy's voice. "All right," Uncle Billy said. "Give me the receipt. Just write it out in your own hand and no monkey business."

The lawyer wrote. Uncle Billy took the receipt with his left hand, still holding the gun on the lawyer.

"This paper ain't foolin' me none, Bub," said Uncle Billy. "I know just as well as I know my name that quick as I get out of this office you'll grab the phone and tell the sheriff."

The lawyer said nothing.

"But it won't do you a speck of good," continued Uncle Billy, backing toward the door. "For jest as sure as you do, I'm goin' to kill you."

He backed out of the door.

Two short blocks brought him to the marble steps of the courthouse. He was not surprised to see Sheriff Jimmy Fox standing on the top step.

"Howdy, Uncle Billy," the sheriff greeted.

"Howdy, Mr. Sheriff," said Uncle Billy.

"Uncle Billy," the sheriff said, "Lawyer Bellinger called up about you, a minute ago."

"I figured," said Uncle Billy.

"He claimed," the sheriff told him, "that you extracted a receipt from him at the point of a hawg-laig. He said you promised to kill him if he protested the mortgage cancellation."

"That's right," said Uncle Billy.

"Come in and sit," the sheriff invited. "Miss Nettie is hunting up the book that the mortgage is recorded in. She'll copy the receipt alongside it, and charge you one dollar."

Uncle Billy climbed the steps. "What'd you tell him?" he asked.

The sheriff smiled. "I told him I figgered you'd do it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In making her nominations for "the ten best active mystery writers," in the international poll conducted by EQMM last year, Agatha Christie cast a vote for Michael Gilbert. If this seems surprising to you, we call your attention to two of Michael Gilbert's recent detective novels — SMALLBONE DECEASED, *considered "best of the year" (Avis DeVoto in "The Boston Globe"), "tops for any season" ("The Saturday Review of Literature"), "a first-rate job" ("The New York Times"), "full marks" ("The San Francisco Chronicle") — and* DEATH HAS DEEP ROOTS, *by "one of the most accomplished leaders of the new British school" (Anthony Boucher), "a fine performance throughout" (Sergeant Cuff), and "outstanding . . . . no mystery connoisseur will miss this one" (Dorothy B. Hughes). So it is with deep pleasure, and a bow to Agatha Christie, that we bring you the first of a series of short-shorts by one of the coming "big names" in British detectivedom — stories that have never before been published in the United States.*

MRS. OLIPHANT DECEASED

by MICHAEL GILBERT

DURING THE RECENT WAR A LOT of matters had to be put on one side. I'd better say I'm senior partner in a very old and very well-known firm of City Solicitors; I have been ever since Herbert died, and that was twelve years ago.

Litigation and property dealings come first. You must keep them moving more or less to schedule or they break down altogether. But the other side of the work — administrations and trusts — are different. Perhaps I shouldn't admit it, but they can take a nap from time to time.

When our young men came back from the war it took them some time to pick up the threads. You don't make — or remake — a practising solicitor in a couple of months, nor even in a couple of years.

I must confess to a certain sinking of the heart when young Bob, who is the most confoundedly energetic of the new lot, came into my room one morning with a dog-eared folder, pale from the sunless depths of the second basement, and said, "I've been looking at Mrs. Oliphant deceased."

"If you've time to do that," I said, "I shall have to look for some more work for you. Why, she's been dead for thirteen years."

"It wasn't her, exactly, sir. I was tidying up Charlie Fanshawe's reversionary interests — you remember, he was killed in North Africa, but some of his mother's estate only fell

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in last year — and I thought I'd have a look at that money he got from his uncle —"

"Great-uncle," I said automatically.

"Yes, sir. Old Robert Fanshawe. I took a copy of his will home last night with me. Really, sir — I don't know if you remember it — it practically seemed to me to add up to nothing less than an open invitation to murder."

"Good heavens," I said, considerably startled. "Look here. I can see you're bursting to explain all this. Jump into a taxi with me and come round to the Club, and we'll talk about it over lunch."

"Robert Fanshawe," I said, when we had settled what we were going to eat — a most important thing to a man of my age. "Let me see, yes — rather an odd character. But his wife, if I remember, was odd as well. A pioneer of the cold water and raw carrot school of health faddists."

"Yes, sir, I gather her husband didn't see eye to eye —"

"He twisted his wife's tail about it, didn't he, in his will?"

"A most extraordinary document. Home-made, I'm sure. Here — I've written down the bit that matters. His trustees are to accumulate all income for twenty-one years. At the end of that time — *but not before* — the whole lot, capital and accumulated income, was to be paid to the United Chlorophyllists — that's that health society his wife belonged to — provided that during those twenty-one years his wife had remained a member of the society, adhered strictly to its rules, and managed to stay alive. If either she, or the Society, failed to survive the twenty-one year period, then everything went to his nephew, Charlie Fanshawe."

"Yes," I said. "I remember him explaining that clause to me. You wouldn't appreciate it without understanding Robert Fanshawe. He was a late Victorian survival — like one of those awful middle-aged friends of Edward VII, when he was Prince of Wales, who used to go round playing school boy tricks on their friends. 'Let her earn the money for her demmed Society,' he said to me. 'If she can survive twenty-one years of their nonsense I'm willing to believe there may be something in it. Otherwise the money's to go to young Charlie. He's only two now, but I can see he's going to enjoy a beef steak and a pint of beer when he grows up' — and he slapped his leg and pulled his side whiskers and toddled off to make someone an apple-pie bed."

"No doubt, sir," said Bob — I think he was a little shocked at my levity. "It would have been quite all right if the trustees *had* accumulated the income. But so far as I can see they seem to have assumed that Mrs. Fanshawe was going to die before the twenty-one years were out — she was already 65 when her husband died — and they treated Charles as a sort of heir presumptive. Most of the income was spent on his upbringing, and they even advanced him lump sums from time to time."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He was an infernally fetching young man," I said. "His great uncle was quite right about him. Let me see now — the trustees were my late partner Herbert Overstrand and the boy's mother."

"It's the trustees I was thinking about," said Robert, ominously. "Charles's mother died in 1933 and for two years your late partner seems to have acted alone. By 1935 he must have realized his position. Why, old Mrs. Fanshawe had only to live another two years and the United Chlorophyllists — or their solicitors — would have been clamoring for their money. Not only the capital wrongly advanced to young Charles but all the income ever spent on him. I've made a rough computation — at compound interest it came to nearly £10,000."

"As much as that," I said. "That wouldn't have been a laughing matter for Herbert, would it? I seem to remember that he appointed another trustee to act with him."

"Yes, sir. And here I suggest is where we meet the villain at the piece. Mr. A. B. Smith."

"Villain!" I said. "Good heavens — do you think — here, have a little more of this smoked salmon. Don't forget to squeeze plenty of lemon over it, it brings out the flavor."

"Perhaps villain is a strong word, sir, but I do feel that his influence over your partner — however, let me go on. This Mr. Smith seems to have been rather an elusive person. I can't find that anyone ever actually met him. Documents were sent to him at a Post Restante address, and came back in due course, duly signed."

"As long as he sent 'em back promptly," I said. "Most trustees who live in the country are so infernally slow."

"Yes, sir. He seems to have been quite business-like. It was at that time that they started having a quarterly doctor's report on old Mrs. Fanshawe. I'm afraid they weren't very encouraging reports — from the trustees' point of view, I mean. Apart from an occasional head cold she seems to have been in robust health."

"Fresh water and carrots," I suggested. "There might be something in it, after all. As a matter of fact, however, I seem to remember that it came out all right in the end. She passed away a week or two short of the end of the twenty-one year period. So the money went to Charlie."

"Yes, sir."

"I don't suppose he complained about having had some of it before he was legally entitled to it. Anyway, he's dead himself now — he did very well in the war, you know. Stopped a shell splinter the day before Tobruk was relieved."

I saw that Robert was looking embarrassed.

"It wasn't Charlie I was thinking about exactly, sir." he said. "After all, he hardly stood to lose. It was the trustees."

"The trustees?"

"Did you know that they visited

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

old Mrs. Fanshawe on the very afternoon of the day she died? They were with her for about half an hour. Her maid found her that evening."

"Heart failure," I said.

"Yes," said Robert. "At 86 I don't suppose there's much difference between heart failure and a bolster over the face — particularly if nobody is looking for it."

"You'll have to be careful, you know," I said, "saying things like that. People might take you seriously. Anyway, how do you know they were down there that afternoon? I don't remember anything being mentioned."

"I found it in your partner's expense book for that day," said Robert. "Fares to Dorking and return: self and co-trustee."

"Good heavens," I said. "How — how methodical. Do try some of this Stilton. Is there anything else in support of your theory? Anything — er — concrete?"

"I don't know, sir." Robert looked distinctly unhappy. "I was going through some of Mr. Overstrand's own papers and I found this. It was with his other private papers." He produced a white envelope. Typed on the outside were the words: *To be opened only on the death of the last to die of myself and A. B. Smith.*

"It looked, sir — I thought — it might be something in the nature of a confession. He might have wanted to get the thing off his chest, and yet not to hurt anyone by doing so."

"You won't mind my saying," I said, "that it all seems a little far-fetched. You've been reading too many detective stories. Anyway, we can't open this until we have proof of Smith's death — and as you say, he seems to be rather an elusive person. In all my years at one office I honestly can't remember meeting him. Good heavens! Look at the time. We must be getting back."

In the cab I said, "It wasn't only to talk about the Fanshawes that I asked you out to lunch, Bob. You almost put it out of my head. Old Horniman wrote to me last week that he's looking for a junior partner and he was kind enough to offer me first nomination from my firm. I must say, I had no hesitation in putting forward your name, and I heard this morning —"

The remainder of the drive back to the office was occupied with Robert's thanks and my disclaimers of them.

"It's a good opportunity," I said, "but I think you're the man for it."

Back at the office I said, "By the way. I don't think we ought to leave that file lying about. Put it back where it came from. I'll get your successor busy on it some time. And you might put that envelope safely back in the Overstrand box."

I didn't tell him of course that it was empty, or that I had long ago destroyed Herbert's maudlin "confession."

Ha!

I didn't tell him who A. B. Smith was, either.

Ha!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

RECIPE FOR HOMICIDE *by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN* (LIPPINCOTT, $2.50)	". . . beautiful mixing of accurate scientific detail with solid human interest. B plus." (LGO)	". . . enough excitement to keep you glued to the page . . . . Very satisfying." (AdV)
THE DAVIDIAN REPORT *by DOROTHY B. HUGHES* (DUELL, SLOAN & PEARCE — LITTLE BROWN, $3.00)	"Wonderful suspense here, in the tight understated technique that lends reality . . . B plus." (LGO)	"Strong accent on atmosphere . . . written with finesse. Subtle." (SC)
IT'S HER OWN FUNERAL *by CAROL CARNAC* (CRIME CLUB, $2.50)	"Carnac novels generally display unusual twists and good writing. This is a neat specimen." (LGO)	"Characterization superior, style extremely winning, and climax of considerable intensity . . ." (AdV)
THE KEY MAN *by CLARENCE BUDINGTON KELLAND* (HARPER, $2.75)	"In a way it's refreshing to find villains so black and heroes so gleaming white . . ." (LGO)	"Dialogue, situations and people are as usual incredibly corny . . . Annoying." (AdV)
ONE-MAN SHOW *by MICHAEL INNES* (DODD, MEAD, $2.50)	". . . one of the briskest surprise endings Innes has ever contrived . . . lovely stuff." (LGO)	"Amazing meshing of spies, counter-spies, and art thieves in a shrewdly plotted, suavely written mystery tale." (DD)
GAME FOR THREE LOSERS *by EDGAR LUSTGARTEN* (SCRIBNER'S, $2.50)	". . . not up to author's swell factual work. So-so." (SC)	". . . treatment . . . remarkably deft . . . Very clever." (AdV)
DEATH IN DARK GLASSES *by GEORGE BELLAIRS* (MACMILLAN, $2.50)	"Pretty good detective work . . . and Bellairs' hearty style for those who like it." (LGO)	"English as they come and relaxing for the dog-days. Will do." (AdV)
NETS TO CATCH THE WIND *by DOLORES HITCHENS* (CRIME CLUB, $2.50)	". . . settings and characters are excellent . . . strong and quiet narration . . . B plus." (LGO)	"Good human values here, a quite credible story . . . and a startling denouement. Expert." (AdV)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key on the right gives sources.

". . . an excellent detective story offering an honest and comic background . . ." (DBH)	"Very good writing. Highly intelligent puzzle. Recommended." (FC)	
". . . welcome . . . Hitchcockism pure and absolute . . . effective and admirable . . ." (AB)	". . . gift of evoking tension and an ingenious capacity for setting it down nerve-wrackingly in familiar places." (JS)	*KEY TO REVIEW SOURCES* AB: *Anthony Boucher in the New York Times*
". . . solidly rewarding in quality with a wise blend of ingenuity and plausibility . . ." (AB)	"Miss Carnac is a solid, careful, pungent craftsman." (JS)	FC: *Frances Crane in the Evansville Press* SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review*
". . . detailed television background is featured but the writing is more childish than Kelland's norm." (DBH)	"Interesting behind-the-scenes television in this one. Readable, too." (FC)	DD: *Drexel Drake in the Chicago Tribune* DBH: *Dorothy B. Hughes in the Los Angeles Daily News*
". . . a highly competent and literate book . . . recommended to all straight detective story readers . . ." (AB)	". . . wordy but often briefly amusing enough to pull one further into the preposterous tangle of text and event . . ." (JS)	LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle*
". . . fascinating study in the nature and relation of criminal and victim." (AB)	". . . steadily interesting and suitably framed to the promise of its title." (JS)	JS: *James Sandoe in the New York Herald Tribune*
". . . novel interlude; abundance of personnel imposes mild strain. Diffuse but pleasant." (SC)	". . . pleasing . . . pungent amusement . . . this seems to be Bellairs at his best." (JS)	AdV: *Avis de Voto in the Boston Globe*
"The characters . . . are so nebulously sketched . . . that the whole exercise becomes pretty dull." (AB)	"Recommended." (FC)	

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Maxey Brooke's "Morte d'Alain" is one of the seven "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Seventh Annual Contest. It is a surprisingly good story considering its difficult background — for here is a tale of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, a tale in which the great Merlin, that master magician, solves a murder case.

The author was born and raised in Oklahoma. He "was shoved out on his own" in the early 1930s, worked his way through the University of Oklahoma, then spent the next few years "booming around the Southwest — construction and pipeline work, seismograph, surveyor, and what-have-you." He got married and drafted almost simultaneously. The high point of his military career was being present at the Bikini atom-bomb tests. Now, in his late thirties, he has charge of a laboratory section in a Texas oil refinery. "I wonder," writes Mr. Brooke, "if you have ever realized that a trouble-shooting chemist like myself is really a detective. A piece of equipment fails, you are called in to investigate, you look for clues, you question the men who operated it, and finally you decide who is the 'murderer' — that is, who or what caused the 'death.' And there is a high stake involved too: all too frequently the crime occurs on high-pressure machines where, if you unmask the wrong culprit, it is the first and last mistake you're allowed."

About twenty-five years ago, Mr. Brooke discovered Poe's "The Gold-Bug," and immediately he became a mystery addict, especially of the short story. Just as a baseball fan wants to play the game, so Mr. Brooke found that he wanted to write detective short stories. After a few failures, he sat down and analyzed EQMM. He figured out that EQMM always demanded good writing, and equally important, stories that were unusual — in plot, characterization, or locale [Editors' Note: Not a bad analysis, Mr. Brooke!]. Then he read one of Lillian de la Torre's Dr. Sam: Johnson stories — and got an idea: why not go back into history, even further back than the Eighteenth Century? And then something else occurred to him: Lillian de la Torre had been struck with the notion that Dr. Sam: Johnson was a perfect character for a detective, and Boswell an equally perfect character for a "Watson." Who else in history would make a perfect detective-character? Merlin, of course! He seemed a "natural!" And equally natural, the sorcerer's apprentice would represent the perfect

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Watson" of those days. So, Mr. Brooke did some historical reading and then let the idea soak for a full year, and "when the story was accepted, I don't know who was proudest, my wife, my daughter, or I." Who was proudest, Mr. Brooke? No, it was not your wife, your daughter, or yourself; EQMM was proudest, as it always is when we learn that EQMM has served as a kind of literary mid-wife to the birth of a "first story" by a new writer.

MORTE D'ALAIN:

An Unrecorded Idyll of the King

by MAXEY BROOKE

IT CAME TO PASS IN THESE DAYS A great calm descended on Merrie England. For five years and more the Danes had not molested the North. The head of Black Mored of Northumberland dried in the sun, impaled on a pike in the courtyard. Nowhere was there oppression or injustice or hunger or want, and the Knights of the Round Table lolled around the Court and waxed fat.

A few very young Knights fared forth to seek adventure and found none save gaming in the taverns. Indeed, it seemed that the day of great deeds was past and the winning of golden spurs was only a dream.

Night after night they gathered at the Round Table for feasting and drinking and telling of tales. The Great Hall rang with the lay of a wandering minstrel or the rafters echoed with hearty laughter at the antics of a group of dwarfs or of a feather-brained buffoon. Other times, they would sit open-mouthed at the feats of my Master Merlin. For the most part, my Master performed what he called "small tricks," whose lore he had entrusted to me. Already I knew the secret of coating one's mouth with storax and secreting therein a small ball of wool soaked in the spirit called *al-kohl*, which is the essence of wines and meads. When this was done, one had but to blow one's breath on a lighted taper and a great rush of flame would issue from one's mouth. Already I had done this in the stables and such was the fear of the stable-lads that even now they turned pale at my approach. But when my Master Merlin heard of this he trounced me soundly and threatened to teach me no more of his art.

"For a magician must never perform cheaply," he had said, "and the awe of stable-lads is not worth the risk of exposing one's secrets." I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

recognized words of wisdom and promised never to perform again until he pronounced me ready.

Now, in my seventeenth year, I was allowed to participate in some of the "small tricks" — such as seeming to change water to wine with the aid of oak gall and fool's gold. And once, King Arthur himself commended me on my bravery in entering a large basket and allowing my Master to pierce it with many swords and pikes. I thanked him gravely, although I knew that at no time had I been in danger. It was after that that Merlin decided my apprenticeship was over and that I should be initiated into the deeper mysteries of sorcery.

No one was more surprised than I to find that sorcery was performed without the aid of spirits and demons, but followed the laws of nature.

"We magicians mask these things with incantations and rituals," explained Merlin, "not to protect ourselves but to prevent the knowledge from falling into evil hands. For if every man were a magician, no man's life would be safe. Knowledge begets knowledge, and each new knowledge is dangerous."

"And our King," I asked, "Does he know this?"

"He is well aware of it. And so long as we use this knowledge to amuse and to further good works he suffers us to continue our deceptions."

And so by day we studied the writings of the ancients and experimented with our vials and powders and alembics, hoping to add a grain to the sands of knowledge. By night we performed our "small tricks" for the Knights of the Round Table assembled, to amuse them and to help hold them together against the time of England's need.

But these were brawny men and full-blooded, given much to boasting and coarse jokes. They were also men of honor, high of temper and quick to take offense. And in these easy times of inaction many were the quarrels which flared up and which were deemed settled only with blood.

Time and again our good King forestalled bloodshed with decisions befitting a Solomon. When words would not suffice he allowed the Knights to settle their quarrel on the jousting field, but only with blunted lances. Yet all could feel the tension growing and growing. All knew that soon even the King's wisdom would not maintain the uneasy peace.

"Were I but King," I once said to my Master, "I would disband the court and do away with these quarrels once and for all."

"Aye," answered Merlin quietly, "and when the Knights returned to their holdings, there would be half a hundred trouble spots instead of one."

'Twas then I recognized that much of the King's wisdom was in reality my Master Merlin's. And 'twas then I knew why our King closeted himself with my Master before and after each gathering of the Round Table.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But even as a pig's bladder must burst when a jester belabors himself with it overmuch, so must strong men's violence burst when kept pent up overlong. And so it was that one evening, in a small room adjoining the Great Hall, a servant found the body of Sir Alain sprawled face down in a pool of blood.

Now let it be said that the servant, unlike many a baseborn man, did not lose his wits and spread abroad a hue and cry. Rather, as though he were answering a summons, he entered my Master's apartment and announced his discovery.

Merlin, albeit annoyed at having his studies interrupted, said to me, "Go, my son, and stand guard over the body. Let none enter the room until I arrive with the King."

I hurried posthaste to the small room. There, even as the servant had said, lay Sir Alain's body. And one could easily see that his death had come of no misadventure nor was it the result of a fair fight. He had been struck down from behind, murdered most foully. The gaping wound between his shoulder blades was from the blow of a wide Danish dagger, such as many of the Knights of the Round Table affected. A brutal crime and a callous one, as could be seen by the black footprint on Sir Alain's white talbard where the murderer had placed his foot in order to withdraw the dagger. And by the streaks of blood where he had coolly cleaned his weapon before returning it to the scabbard.

I arrived none too soon. Scarce had I time to note the condition of the corpse when a serving lad entered the room on some mission. On seeing the quantity of blood, the lad drew up and stood, mouth agape, for the space of six heartbeats. He turned and ran from the room, screaming at the top of his voice, "'Tis blood, 'tis blood, 'tis blood!"

Hard on his outcry came the Knights, the squires, the serving men, the court rabble. They stopped at my raised hand and all but the Knights disbanded at my word, for my fame as a sorcerer was waxing. The Knights continued to press around the door, held back only by fear of the magic pentagram I was enscribing in the air with my finger.

Their anger was only outdone by their disbelief that such a deed could have been done. To them it was readily evident that this was murder. And to them it was equally evident that one of their own company was the murderer, none but a Knight who had warred with the Danes and had won in fair combat such a weapon as had struck down fair Sir Alain.

As the first shock wore off, I could see the Knights drawing back and eyeing one another with distrust and suspicion. 'Twas an ugly thing to see — the breakdown of the feeling of brotherhood amongst them. Full glad was I at the appearance of the King, followed closely by my Master.

The King's face was white and drawn behind his huge red beard,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and his brows were drawn together in anger. And only I knew the effort of my Master in keeping his face calm and reposed. The King turned to the Knights assembled and well did they draw back at his anger, though they were strong men and brave.

I expected a great roar, for the King had a full voice; but the King spoke softly, which was all the more frightening for its softness.

"Let him that did this step forth."

There was no movement.

"Let him that did this step forth and I will slay him honorably with my own hands."

There was no movement.

And the King's voice then rose to a roar that could be heard to the utmost parts of the castle. "Then I will seek you out, strip you of your Knighthood, and see you hanged from the highest battlements." Even Sir Lancelot could not conceal a quaking at the King's intensity.

He turned to my Master. "What will you need to reveal this foul varlet who calls himself a Knight?"

My Master stood a full minute, his head bent in contemplation.

"His blood will tell. I will need Sir Alain's blood-soaked talbard and the bloodstained stones whereon he lies. At moonrise let the Knights be assembled in the Great Hall — barefoot, to prove their humbleness, and clad only in singlets. Let each man be seated at his regular appointed place at the Round Table. Let no squires nor serving men nor other baseborn be present, for there is to be revealed a great mystery. And let none touch aught that he sees on the Great Table."

Without hesitation, although these were strange requests, the King said quietly, "So be it."

He turned on his heel and marched away toward the chapel. One by one the Knights followed to offer up prayers for Sir Alain's soul. My Master looked me full in the eyes, then he too departed, leaving me strangely aware of what I was to do.

Not for long was I alone with the corpse. Soon came two black-robed friars. They removed Sir Alain's befouled talbard and handed it to me with many an open sign of the cross and covert sign of the horns to ward off the evil eye. They then bore him away to prepare Sir Alain for burial.

Hard on the friars came workmen with bars and mauls to remove the bloody stones. Only my presence and the fear of some meaningless but strange hand passes I made overcame their lesser fear of the death chamber.

The stones I had carried to the Great Hall. Then closing the door, I chalked a few Arabic symbols thereon, knowing full well that none but my Master would enter.

Thereon I retired to our chambers where Merlin awaited me. Wordlessly he held out his hand for the talbard, and having spread it on a table, studied it full long. Though I wished mightily to talk of the day's happenings, I knew to hold my peace until my Master finished his medita-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tions. I pretended to study an ancient scroll. At last my Master looked up from the table.

"My son, an hour before moonrise, take yonder casket to the Great Hall. Then station yourself at the door to see that all the Knights are garbed as I directed. When the Knights are assembled, enter with them and await my coming." He took the scroll from my hand, glanced at it, and smiled, "When you read Hebrew, hold the scroll thus." He reversed the scroll and returned it to me.

I spent the remainder of the day studying the Mysteries of Pythagoras to atone for the error in the manner of my reading of the Hebrew scroll. When at last the glass showed it to be an hour till moonrise, I put aside the Mysteries without being much wiser. The casket my Master had indicated I now took to the Great Hall and set it therein. I removed the signs from the door and awaited the Knights.

One by one they came, each looking darkly at the others. Each paused beneath where his shield was hung, removed his outer garments and shoes, and entered the Great Hall. Not a word was said.

On the dais, where the King was accustomed to sit, lay the bier of Sir Alain, lit at head and toe with tall tapers. In the dim light sat the Knights, even the King, shorn of their trappings, each in his place at the Round Table.

All eyes turned ever and anon to the eastern casement. As the silver edge of the moon appeared over the horizon, all turned toward the door. There in a great rush of flame and smoke appeared my Master Merlin, clad in his magician's robes and wearing a great coned cap.

He advanced to the foot of the Round Table, eyed each Knight in turn, and intoned solemnly, "Does the murderer wish to confess now or shall I call upon the powers of darkness to seek him out?"

There was a stir around the table as each Knight shuddered, but none spoke.

"Then so be it." He nodded to me.

I lifted the basket of stones torn from the floor of the murder room and stained with the blood of the dead man. I carried them around the table and my Master placed one stone in front of each Knight.

"The blood of the stones seeks the blood on the murderer's hands!"

Each Knight sat far back in his chair, eyes fixed on the stone in front of him. Fear was on every face.

Next I brought forward the casket. From it my Master removed a device most cunningly contrived; an arrow with an iron head mounted on a pivot, so that it could swing freely. This he set in the middle of the Round Table.

"Now I call on the greatest forces known: blood and iron! The blood of the murdered man cries for vengence. The iron is thirsty for that blood. I shall swing the arrow around and it shall come to rest pointing to that bloody stone before the murderer."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He gave the arrow a twirl. Around and around it went, slower and slower. And at last it came to a stop, pointing to the stone before Sir Warfield.

His face was white behind his black beard. He cried in a mighty voice, " 'Tis chance! 'Tis but chance!" As well condemn a man on the throw of the dice."

"Nay, 'tis not chance," said Merlin quietly, " 'tis the power of darkness. 'Tis the attraction of a murdered man's blood for iron."

He gave the arrow another twirl. Again it made its ever-slowing rounds and again it stopped and again it pointed to the stone before Sir Warfield.

He stood up, his mouth working for a moment; then once more he cried out, " 'Tis trickery! Yon Merlin spun the arrow in such a manner as to make it stop here!"

With those words he gave the arrow a mighty buffet. And for the third time it stopped directly before him.

Sir Warfield stood looking at the arrow for a time one could count to ten slowly. Then he sat back in his chair, collapsing even as a jester's bladder when pierced with a bodkin.

" 'Tis sorcery," he gasped, in a strangled voice, " 'Tis sorcery. Aye, I killed him. I did him in even as that cursed arrow says. I killed him."

There was a silence in the Great Hall — a silence in part of relief and in part of revulsion. And King Arthur said slowly, "Take him away."

He was taken away and given over to the hangman. Even as the King had ordered, he was hanged from the highest battlements at dawn.

'Twould be a fitting end to this tale to say that the murder shocked the Knights back into a sense of duty, but such was not the case. Ere the week was up they were again boasting and brawling.

Back in our chambers, I awaited my Master's pleasure, but when he saw fit to say nothing, I asked, "Sir, riddle me this mystery. Did you truly call on the powers of darkness?"

"Nay, my son. There are no powers of darkness save in the minds of men."

He reached into his wallet. "Do you recognize this stone?"

" 'Tis one of the cobbles from the floor whereon Sir Alain died."

"Nay. 'Tis a stone from the shores of a far land, and it is ofttimes called a lodestone. It has the strange power of attracting iron unto itself. I simply put this stone before Sir Warfield, knowing full well that the arrow, with its iron head, would always stop pointing toward it."

I tried to resume my studies, but another thought occurred.

"How did you know to put the stone before Sir Warfield, sir?"

"I had the Knights remove their shoes — not to humble themselves, as I said, but rather to enable me to examine each shoe. The stitching on the sole of Sir Warfield's right shoe matched the print on Sir Alain's talbard. Remember, no cobbler, however clever, can ever sew two shoes so that the stitching on them is exactly the same."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE JINX MAN

by STUART PALMER

ROSCOE BROCK HAD ALWAYS BEEN Fortune's fair-haired boy, and then his luck ran out. If coming events cast their shadows before, then his life was just one shadow after another, all with the same grim outline.

He went for a canter one Sunday morning — and came galloping back with a bullet-hole through his hat. Then there was the birthday bottle of cognac that seemed spoiled, and had to be thrown away. It was retrieved by the colored scrubwoman, who showed up weeks later to get her pay, looking as if she had been in the Valley of the Shadow, as indeed she had. Again, caught by a sudden shower, Brock descended into the subway for shelter and was somehow crowded off the platform to land in front of a train, which stopped only inches from where he sprawled.

Three narrow escapes. It was the kind of luck which couldn't hold out forever. The next thing to happen to him was Miss Hildegarde Withers, which must have seemed a little like adding insult to injury.

The spinster schoolma'am was sitting in the comparative coolness of a little garden restaurant in the village, and over the coffee had been giving a brief review of a book she'd read. "And victims are born or shaped by society just as criminals are. Oscar Piper, are you listening to me?"

The Inspector came out of his meditations with a start. He had been trying to decide what it was that his dinner companion reminded him of in the odd hat she was wearing tonight. Perhaps one of those funny angular Dutch houses, with a stork's nest on top. "Yes, Hildegarde. Very interesting, but —"

Her sniff was audible. "Dr. von Hentig's book is *more* than that, it presents a totally new approach to criminology. He suggests that many victims of crime practically ask for it; they stand in the path of the deed and tempt the criminal."

"Horsefeathers!"

"But insurance experts say some people are accident-prone. Haven't you run into others who seem murder-prone?" As he started to shake his head she added: "Oscar, would the name *Roscoe Brock* refresh your memory any?"

Piper jerked as if stung. "You been listening at keyholes or something?"

"No, but I have my sources of information. By the way, is it true that Brock's reason for taking out a $100,000 life insurance policy is that he's resigned himself to the fact that he must keep his appointment in Samarra, and soon?"

"Judas priest in a mixmaster!" yelped the Inspector. "It's the weather! This time of year, with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the dog-days and the humidity, is the silly season for sure." He mopped his face. "Look, Hildegarde, this Brock thing — well, the other afternoon a Mrs. Millicent Jones comes barging into my office. One of those meek, prettyish women who look as if they wouldn't say 'Boo!' to a goose but who always stick like a cockleburr until they get their way. She introduces herself as confidential-secretary to this fellow Brock —"

"I know. Once called 'the Boy Wizard of Wall Street'; has made and lost several millions; twice married to and divorced from the same woman, an arty dancer named Nadia something who's wasting her sweetness on the desert air of Hollywood. Don't look so surprised, there's nothing much for a retired schoolma'am to do *but* read the newspapers. Anyway go on, I'm all ears."

"Ears? You mean *nose*. Well, anyway, this Jones woman insists that her boss is headed for a hearse. She wants us to drop everything and keep him from what she calls 'Foul Play', though she can't suggest any suspect or any possible motive."

"The lady then is more worried than the potential victim?"

"Less fatalistic, anyway. Seems she's worked for Brock for years, ever since he started on a shoestring, and she isn't going to see him cut down."

"And I suppose, Oscar, that with your usual tact you told her that if and when Mr. Brock actually *got* himself murdered you'd investigate, but now run along?"

The Inspector had the grace to look sheepish. "Well, the bureau is too busy with homicides that have happened to be able to spare men for preventive detection. And those accidents — or near-accidents — could happen to anybody."

"Murder can happen to anybody," snapped Miss Withers. "And does, to some resident of our fair land, on an average of every 45 minutes. Nor am I convinced that those were accidents, though I'm going to find out. You see, one of my former pupils at P. S. 38 has grown up to be an executive at Guardian Assurance, and he tells me that they're worried about Brock's new policy. They've heard rumors, and they want to know if the man actually does have a shorter expectancy than he should have at his age. I've been called in as a sort of unofficial consultant to help them decide if the policy should be cancelled. So you see, even if the police are calmly going to sit on their thumbs and let Brock die, I'm not!"

"Curfew shall not ring tonight, eh?" The Inspector was amused. "Okay, Hildegarde. But I'll bet you a new hat you're wrong. Real murderers don't fool around with fake accidents that misfire — they come right to the point and it's usually the point of a knife or pistol. So sleuth all you want, just as long as you keep out of mischief — and out of my hair."

"What hair?" murmured Miss Withers, eyeing him critically.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But she was into mischief at the crack of dawn next morning. Before 7 o'clock the schoolteacher was prowling along Central Park South outside the apartment house in which Roscoe Brock kept a modest ten-room duplex. She even looked up hopefully at the fifth floor, but all the eyes of the building were lidded against the sun with closed venetian blinds. Then a woman came suddenly striding out of the apartment house entrance like a young queen, to step into a taxi. She bore herself as if long scarlet evening gown, four diamond bracelets, and a sable stole were required uniform for this early hour. She also wore tears, one on each cheek.

It was not until hours later, when Miss Withers was deep in the bound volumes of old newspapers in the public library, that there was anything to connect this fine-feathered but unhappy lady with Roscoe Brock. Then, in the columns of an eight months' old Sunday supplement she saw that same proud face, under a headline: *Love Twice Strangled by Ticker Tape.* The story, seemingly written in a perfumed solution of benzedrine instead of ink, recounted how exotic Nadia Nordica was off to Palm Springs to divorce the Boy Wizard of Wall Street for the second time. The artist had depicted her lightly clad in wispy scarves and skipping nymph-like into the forest, pursued by an apathetic Pan who had paused to read the financial section.

"Dear, dear!" murmured Miss Withers. Some women obviously didn't know when they were well off. She hesitated, and then decided on a frontal attack. After a phone call and a ride downtown in the subway, she came at last to a tower above the famous street that starts in a graveyard and ends in the river. The names of the Roscoe Brock enterprises lettered on the door outnumbered the employees loitering within. But Mrs. Millicent Jones was waiting for her. "You're Miss Withers? I must say I thought somehow that you'd be — different."

"I am. Sometimes, Mrs. Jones, it's an advantage in my line of work *not* to look like a policewoman," the schoolteacher declared brazenly.

"Just call me Jonesy, everybody does." The secretary dressed and bore herself in a manner that insisted she was younger and prettier than was actually the case, but she oozed competence. "R. B. isn't down today — naturally he's still a little shaken from his experience in the subway. Men are such babies, aren't they?"

Miss Withers murmured that her experience with men and babies too had been limited. But she was being led along by Jonesy. "Come this way. We'll use R. B.'s office, it's private and cosy." Jonesy unlocked a door with her own key.

About as cosy as Grant's Tomb, the schoolteacher thought — all dark wood and heavy leather, with too many gadgets. She declined a cigarette, and waited while Jonesy plunked herself down behind a big mahogany

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

desk and lighted her own, blowing smoke through wide, eager nostrils. "All right, let's get going. You see, I handle all R. B.'s personal problems."

"The immediate problem, I believe, is how to keep him alive?"

"Yes. What we want is a murder investigation, only before-the-fact." Jonesy went on to answer a number of pertinent questions about the accidents. The shot on the bridle path had come when R. B. was spending a weekend with the Stevenses. Bob Stevens had been his business partner years ago. The breakup had been as amicable as those things ever can be, and the two men had remained friends, though hardly intimates. At first the shot had been blamed on some careless hunter.

"But May is hardly the season for Nimrods," Miss Withers observed.

"Exactly. And it couldn't have been some small boy with a .22, because the hole in R. B.'s hat — it was a beautiful Borsalino — was big enough to have been made by a 30-30." Jones went on to discuss the birthday cognac, which had been delivered by messenger, she supposed, among other gifts. Even though the card had been lost, everyone had taken it for granted that the bottle was a gift from some old friend, because it was Brock's favorite brand. It had immediately been opened for an office party, along with a cake with *Life Begins at 40* in pink candies from "the girls" and a box of cigars from the men. Jonesy herself had given him a pair of Glen Argyles knitted by her own hands. Anyway, a toast had been proposed in lily-cups but someone had discovered that there was something wrong with the cognac. Perhaps it had turned to grape-dust and vinegar, as old brandy will. It had been recorked and dropped into the wastebasket. And of course by the time they heard about the scrubwoman and learned the seriousness of the matter, the original wrappings had long since vanished in the trash. "But wasn't it lucky," Jonesy cried, "that R. B. only took one tiny sip of the awful stuff?"

"Lucky for everyone except the scrubwoman," Miss Withers pointed out dryly.

"Yes, poor Verzine. That was her name, Verzine Colman. The building super said that when she came to get her pay she looked grayish-green, like a zombie. R. B. had me send her a check for a hundred, though we weren't obligated. She had no business scavenging in the wastebaskets, though of course they all do."

The conference was interrupted endlessly by the telephone. Jonesy made and broke appointments for her employer, squabbled with his shirtmakers and tailor, and reminded the tobacconist that again he had sent the wrong cigars. "R. B. is just a little boy at heart," Jonesy explained. "He knows he shouldn't smoke those big heavy coronas, but you have to watch him every minute!"

"I can imagine," said the school-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

teacher. She finally managed to get back on the subject of the incident in the subway, which proved to be the most baffling of all. The attack could hardly have been premeditated. Nobody could have known that Brock would take off early that afternoon and go shopping near Times Square, seeking cactus and tropical plants for his terrarium . . .

"His *what?*" demanded Miss Withers blankly.

"Terrarium. Above the bar in his living room. It's like an aquarium only instead of water you put in sand and cactus and maybe a lizard or a toad. The idea is to make your guests thirsty."

"My, how the other half lives!" The schoolteacher shook her head.

Anyway, Jonesy went on to explain that a sudden thundershower had caught R. B. unawares, without a taxi in sight. Having had a lifetime fear of thunder and lightning he ducked into the 47th Street subway — and had been innocently reading his newspaper in the midst of the rush hour crowd when he found himself shoved off the platform.

"But surely there were plenty of witnesses this time?"

"Too many. In a jam like that nobody notices anything, not even the trainmen and guards. It all happened so quick, and R. B. was engrossed with his paper. The one who pushed him must have just melted away in the crowd. So taking the three incidents together, they prove —"

"Among other things, that the would-be murderer is more persistent than dexterous. By the way, just what sort of business do you people carry on here?"

"A little of everything," Jonesy admitted. "Apart from playing the market, we buy up bankruptcies, promote inventions, and deal in subcontracts. But that's all over now. There's only a skeleton staff, to wind things up. We're retiring. R. B. always said he'd retire when he got to be 40 and just enjoy life."

"That usually means fast women and slow horses, does it not?"

"You don't know R. B. No chorus girls for him. He had enough of that sort of thing when he was married to *that woman.* Why, he even backed concerts and recitals and two musical shows, trying to buy her way in, but each time he got his fingers burned. Not that she didn't have some talent, but —" Jonesy smiled smugly. "Anyway, R. B.'s ready to settle down. He has a place up at Loon Lake in Maine, where there's trout and salmon fishing."

"He'd like to settle down, if someone doesn't settle him first. And yet there is no one with a motive to want him dead. What about his former partner?"

"Oh, Mr. Stevens was sore as a boil at one time. You see, R. B. bought him out when it looked as if the firm was going under, and then next year we hit the jackpot. But that's all forgotten. Besides, Mr. Stevens was here at the birthday

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

party, and took a drink of the cognac. He wouldn't have done that if —"

"I see. Well, there's always *cui bono*. Who benefits by Brock's will?"

Jonesy shook her head. "There isn't one. And the only relative I know anything about is a distant cousin who's a medical missionary out in Korea."

"Beyond suspicion, surely. As well as out of rifle, poison, and subway range." Miss Withers suddenly stood up. "You've been most helpful. And now if you'll phone Mr. Brock and tell him that I'm on my way up to see him . . .?"

The woman looked childishly disappointed. "But I thought we'd have lunch and I'd outline what ought to be done for R. B.'s protection, and then I'd take you up —"

"Thank you, but I'm afraid I must play a lone hand, and have a free one." Overruling all protests Miss Withers departed, feeling more than a little confused.

Back uptown again, she was kept waiting for some time outside the door of apartment 5A. Finally, after she had identified herself by shouting through the closed door, it was opened by a man in dressing gown and wrinkled silk pajamas who could only be Roscoe Brock in person. "Sorry to keep you waiting," he said. "But I was resting. Didn't get much sleep last night, as you can well imagine." Miss Withers, thinking of Nadia and the wispy scarves, let her imagination run riot.

Her host was explaining that he had let his servants go, as a precaution. "The worst thing about the awful fix I'm in is that I can't trust anybody!" Miss Withers followed him into the living room. A slight, tense man, this Boy Wizard of yesterday. He had a round, youthful face marked by a pert nose, and a muscular but knobby body. For all his fitness he was afraid — she sensed that beneath the surface flippancy. "So you're the hotshot murder expert the insurance company has sent to end all my troubles?"

"I also work with the police at times," she advised him, and sat herself primly down on a hard chair. The room was striking and colorful, but hardly relaxing. In spite of herself the schoolteacher kept staring at the collection of primitives, and the carved wooden gods from Africa and Polynesia which decorated the place. Polymorphous, nightmarish deities, full of ancient guile.

"Don't mind the parlor pantheon," Brock told her. "When I took this place last winter, after the separation, I let Jonesy plan it with the interior decorators and I guess they went overboard on jungle sculpture. But they say you can get used to anything. Now and then I have a feeling that some of them are waiting for me to offer up a goat without horns." He indicated a particularly ugly little mahogany godlet who squatted on the piano. "That's Dumballa, from Haiti. Doesn't he look as if he'd relish a bloody sacrifice?"

Miss Withers sniffed, and started

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to say something about graven images, but the doorbell interrupted. Brock came back bearing a little armful of letters, papers, and packages. "Only the morning mail, late as usual. One moment . . ."

"Expecting something important? Perhaps a threat, or a demand for money?"

Brock flicked a glance at her, and nodded. "Perhaps. Because there must be some pattern behind this persecution. I keep hoping they'll come out into the open." He was tossing letter after letter aside half-read. Miss Withers decided that he was not as youthful as he had seemed at first. Perhaps he was one of the men who, like Lindbergh or the Duke of Windsor or Mickey Rooney, go straight from boyishness into old age without ever passing through maturity at all. A green apple withering, a wrinkled youth . . .

"Hello, what's this?" Brock said suddenly. In his hand he held a small cardboard carton punched with holes, the top nearly covered with cancelled stamps. "This must be the lizard I ordered for my terrarium! Sent down to a novelty house in Texas for it — what most people call a horned-toad. I thought it would give some of my hard-drinking guests a jolt to look up and see one of these little beasts blinking at them through the glass." He rose and started toward the other end of the room, ripping off wrappings and lifting the cover. Then he gave a cry, and flung the box from him with a round Elizabethan oath. He leaped lightly into a chair. "Look out, for God's sake!" he screamed, pointing.

"I *am* looking out!" Miss Withers found herself perched on the grand piano with her feet tucked underneath her skirt. The first thought that popped into her head was that somebody had sent Brock a Gila monster by mistake. But those creatures were only mildly poisonous, and nothing to make all this fuss about.

Then she saw it. A gaudy worm, no more than ten or twelve inches long, flowed sluggishly across the carpet toward her. It looked like something created in a nightmare and decorated by a retarded child playing with kindergarten colors — blunt at head and tail, ringed with black and red and yellow, a creature garish and incredible and altogether evil. The ophidian eyes were alert, unblinking.

"*Coral snake!*" Brock croaked hoarsely. "Deadlier than ten cobras!"

"Habitat Central America, Mexico, and the Gulf States," Miss Withers chimed in automatically. She reached out for the wooden deity beside her, prayed a silent prayer to Dumballa, and then dropped the heavy statuette squarely on the wriggling reptile.

It was all over. The schoolteacher slid limply off the piano, walked over to the nearest divan, and passed out cold. When she regained consciousness she found Roscoe Brock inexpertly trying to pour whisky down her throat. "Take that awful stuff away," she

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cried, strangling. "It's worse than the snake."

He was staring at her with a new and grudging respect. "I guess I underestimated you. But what would anybody think, with you wearing that low-comedy getup?"

"Never mind the pretty speeches. My hats are my own business." Miss Withers stood up, wavering a little. The snake was real — it still lay there in a smashed puddle of bloody pulp. A near thing. Perhaps Brock had underestimated her, but she had certainly overestimated herself. She looked questioningly at him. "Where —?"

"The bathroom? Right down the hall, on the left," he said quickly.

"I'm not going to be sick, I'm going to telephone!" Miss Withers snapped.

And soon the apartment resounded to the heavy tread of men in uniform. There was much dusting of fingerprint powder, and glaring of flashbulbs. The hat with the bullet-holes was produced and photographed. The smashed snake was photographed. Even Dumballa, leering obscenely, had his picture taken.

But Inspector Oscar Piper liked to get his hands on something tangible, something that might eventually be Exhibit A in a courtroom. His original skepticism forgotten, he pounced happily on the cardboard box, the wrappings, and the typed address label. Without taking the dead panatella from his mouth, he assigned one man to start tracing the box and paper, another to the post-office angle, and a third to work on all typewriters accessible to anyone connected with the case. "The snake I'll work on myself," Piper decided. "I suppose it came from some zoo."

At one end of the room Roscoe Brock had at last found willing ears to listen to his tale of woe, and fingers to take it down in official notebooks. He obligingly stuck the Borsalino on top of his head, while a ballistics expert decided that if the bullet had been an inch lower it would have been *finis* right there. Brock drew a map of the bridle path near the Stevens home, and located the attack in the subway. It had been near the north end of the platform, halfway between the gum machine and the newsvendor's stand, directly opposite a theatrical poster advertising the latest musical hit.

"Brock's very cooperative, for a millionaire," the Inspector observed softly.

"And why not?" Miss Withers sniffed. "Right now he's a *murderee* first and a millionaire second. But Oscar — four attacks, and still no sign of a motive!"

"Thousands of people with motives," admitted Roscoe Brock later. "I've been thinking it over. Nobody can fight his way to the top in business without stepping on toes here and there. My conscience is as clear as the next man's, but I must have wrecked competitors, fired employees who never got another job, and been lucky where better men have failed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There must be countless people who hate my guts. One of them must have brooded over his imagined wrongs until he cracked mentally."

"Homicidal maniacs?" The Inspector couldn't swallow that.

"Well, who but a maniac would try to kill me by mailing me a poisonous snake?"

He had a point there. "If you look at it in the proper perspective," the schoolteacher put in, "no *sane* person commits murder. Too much risk involved."

"Just what I said!" Brock cried. "Out of all those thousands —"

Piper said he'd settle for just one suspect, closer home. "How about this ex-wife of yours?"

For the first time in days Roscoe Brock laughed aloud. "Nadia? No!"

"Of course, in a way you did wreck her ambitions," Miss Withers suggested softly, watching his face.

"What do you mean? I poured hundreds of thousands into Nadia's career. I gave her recitals at Carnegie, I hired the best coaches and teachers for her, and even a symphony pianist to play her accompaniments. I backed shows, I got other dancers fired so she could have the main spot. Everything that money could do —"

"Exactly," said Miss Withers. "You smothered her. And then when she wanted you to choose between her and your business, you let her go. Hell hath no fury . . ."

He shook his head. "Not Nadia. Besides, we're still friends, in a casual way."

The schoolteacher wondered how casual one could get by 7 A.M. But Piper waved his hand impatiently. "Okay, Mr. Brock. What about your former partner?"

"Bob Stevens? Oh, he was bitter for a while, because he had an idea I'd made things look worse than they were during that bad year, so I could buy him out cheap. Once in a while I still catch a funny glint in his eye when I complain about high income taxes. He's the moody, introspective type, though he's been grateful enough for the bite of business I toss him now and then. But he's out as a suspect."

"I know," said Miss Withers wearily. "He took a sip of the poisoned cognac."

Piper frowned. "Well, your employees then? How about the Jones woman?"

"But Jonesy's my right hand! She's a regular Rock of Gibraltar. For fifteen years her job has meant everything to her. Oh, she did have a husband, but he drifted away and is supposed to have drunk himself to death. She lives for her work — she's been more like a partner than an employee."

"Now you're retiring, and what has *she* got?" demanded Miss Withers. "Perhaps she was more like a partner than a secretary, but she only got a secretary's pay."

Brock looked blank. "I hadn't thought of that. But still — I tell you that Jonesy is incapable of anything like this. She was the one who

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

went to the police. Besides, did you notice the stamps on that package the snake was in?"

"The man is a bit of a detective himself," said Miss Withers a little later, when she was alone with the Inspector.

"Maybe so. But he only seemed inclined to knock down the suspects as we set 'em up. And what was that about the stamps?"

"He meant that Mrs. Jones was not the type to put on a dollar's worth of postage when 30 cents would do. A point well taken."

Piper shrugged. "Well, what can I do with a guy like that? Except maybe hold him in protective custody."

"You couldn't keep him locked up forever, and when he came out it would start all over again. Oscar, one thing does occur to me. Homicidal maniac or not, the person we're seeking is close enough to Brock to know his favorite bridle path, his pet brand of cognac, his fear of electrical storms, and even his terrarium."

"Inside job, eh? Maybe we better go down and have another talk with that Jones woman. She might be just clever enough to ask protection for her intended victim."

But for once Miss Withers had no desire to get into the act. "You go ahead, Oscar. I think I'll try to locate Brock's former wife, and ask her why, after she spent the night in his apartment, she left at 7 A.M. in tears."

Leaving the Inspector flatfooted, the schoolteacher started off by her lone, sniffing at a cold scent. Her luck was in. At a taxi stand on Central Park South she found the driver who had picked up a lady in evening dress early that morning and taken her to the Hotel Griffon, one of the small theatrical hostelries on West 47th St. But the desk clerk was unwilling to commit himself to anything, even that it was a hot day. Miss Nordica might or might not be registered. Maybe she'd checked out.

"Well! I'm from her husband's office, and I was only trying to do her a favor. The police will be here any minute to ask her a lot of embarrassing questions."

"One moment," said the clerk, starting to back away into an inner office.

"And you may tell her," called Miss Withers, "that I'll stay here in the lobby till she does decide to see me. She'll have to come down some time."

It was a short wait. "You can go up to 11B after all," the man reported back. Something in his voice implied that whatever happened it served her right.

At her knock a woman's pleasant voice said "Come in!" and Miss Withers came in to receive a chilly squirt of soda-water full in the face. For a long moment the two women stood staring at each other, equally paralyzed. Nadia broke first, dropping the siphon and clutching her face dramatically. "Oh, no!" The flood of apologies was almost as breathtaking

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as the fizz-water had been. "But I thought — they said you were from Roscoe's office, and when you were so insistent about seeing me I was positive that you must be that Jones woman!"

Miss Withers stood dripping, in injured dignity. The dancer was less queenly today, wearing a tight sweater and slacks. But still beautiful, the schoolteacher conceded, with the detachment of one who never in her balmiest days had any pretentions. She permitted herself to be mopped at with a towel. "Is this the way you usually greet your husband's secretary when she comes calling?"

"I'd like to make it buck-shot! That office-wife! Office-mother, rather. The way she's got her hooks into that man! But I am sorry you got wet."

"One of the hazards of the trade," Miss Withers told her. "I see that I'm interrupting your unpacking." There was an open suitcase on the day-bed.

"Packing, you mean." The dancer stood against the wall, taut as a bow-string. "I never should have come back anyway. But what's this about the police?"

Miss Withers explained somewhat sketchily why she was involved in the case. "You see, something almost happened to Mr. Brock again. This time it was a snake."

"But how *horrible!*" Nadia sank into a chair. "Then I was wrong! When Roscoe wrote me about the other accidents, I thought he was lying. I thought he was making it all up, to get me to come rushing back to him."

"And yet you did come rushing back?"

"But of course! If he cared that much —"

"I see. Love is a wonderful thing, and sometimes I'm sorry that I have had so little first-hand experience. At any rate, he cared enough to have you spend the night in his apartment, didn't he? May I ask why you were leaving at 7 this morning, dressed to the teeth?"

The red lips opened, thinned, and shut like a trap.

"I'm sorry, but I'm investigating a murder even if it hasn't happened yet. You are quite aware, of course, that spending the night under the same roof with your husband during the interlocutory period of one year invalidates your California decree? It makes you his wife again — and his widow and heir, if anything happens to him." The schoolteacher, having loosed her petard, stood up to go.

But Nadia blocked the door. "What if I were to tell you that I got in late last night, and when I couldn't reach Roscoe by phone I went to a party at the home of some friends — a very late party? I thought he might be there, you see. What if I said that when the party broke up — at dawn — I felt sentimental and worried, and rushed over to Roscoe's apartment, and he wouldn't even let me in?"

"Offhand, my dear young woman,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I'd say you were telling a big fat lie."

"But you couldn't be sure, could you?"

Miss Withers, somewhat nettled, said that there were ways of checking such things. "What friends gave the party? The police will be asking. Only by that time I suppose you'll have arranged with somebody to back up your story." She moved to the door.

Nadia smiled an odd smile. "Don't climb on your broomstick and take off quite yet, please." She turned, raising her voice. "Bob! Come here!"

The bathroom door opened and a man came blithely in. He was the man of distinction, from the tanned face beneath gray temples to the highball in his hand. "This is Miss — I'm sorry I can't seem to remember your name, I know it was part of a horse. Withers, that's it. Miss Withers, Robert Stevens."

"Delighted," said Roscoe Brock's ex-partner. He even looked delighted.

"Bob and I were having a talk, about Roscoe and everything," the dancer explained. "He wanted to leave, but I thought if it really was Jonesy bursting in on me I'd better have a witness." She turned. "Bob, was I at your place last night — all night?"

Without hesitation he said "But of course. Lovely party. Our latchstring is always out, pot-luck, and all that sort of thing." He laughed easily, and Nadia chimed in.

"Well!" said Miss Withers. "It isn't funny." She paused in the doorway. "Roscoe Brock is in grave danger. Right now anything may be happening to him."

"Fine!" cried Nadia. "I hope it's something with boiling oil in it!"

The schoolteacher made a quick exit, clutching her hat and the shreds of her dignity. Somehow she felt just a little confused. Deep in the bottom of her mind a little red light was flashing off and on, warning her that there was something she had failed to notice, something like a stone left unturned. But there was so much to do, there were so many places she had to go! If she could only be like the man in that story, and leap on a horse and gallop off in all directions . . .

She did her level best to do just that. It was not until almost six that evening that she came rushing into the Inspector's office, to find her old friend and sparring-partner not in one of his better moods. "Well, Oscar, why the long face? Don't tell me the machinery has bogged down? Didn't the fingerprints match, and couldn't the paper be traced?"

"How right you are," he told her heavily.

"The address label was probably typed on some demonstration machine on a shop counter when the clerk was busy elsewhere? And the wrapper was second-hand and had been taken, stamps and all, from the remains of some old package in a trash can?"

"How'd you know that?" Piper demanded, a little startled.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A good guess. I did notice that the postmark was Grand Central, a week old. Which would imply that the snake never went through the mails at all."

"Probably," sighed the Inspector. "The killer could have just left it at the desk in Brock's apartment house. Worse than that, I found that there isn't a coral snake within a thousand miles of here, not even in a zoo. Animal dealers don't supply them." Just then a uniformed man came in with a paper sack, a container of coffee, and change for a dollar. "You should have warned me if you expected to be squired to a spaghetti joint tonight," Piper told Miss Withers apologetically. "I'm eating in, because I have work to do —"

"Heavens, I forgot lunch! Even-steven on the pastrami sandwiches." A little later, over her share of the coffee, Miss Withers said, "Did you call on Jonesy?"

"Yes — a dry run. She says she hates snakes and she never fired a gun in her life and she finally tried to slap my face and went into hysterics because she said I was insinuating that she was responsible for the attacks on Brock, her one ewe lamb. Loyalty is a wonderful thing, if not carried too far."

Miss Withers nodded. "Oscar, almost from the beginning one thing has been clear about this case. The person behind these attacks on Roscoe Brock is not only someone close to him, someone who knows his every move, but who —"

"But who hates his guts. Elementary, Miss Watson."

"That's the catch, Oscar. Whoever it is has a sort of psychological block that makes him shoot an inch too high, use an easily-detected poison in the cognac, push his victim in front of a train that was already slowing down for a stop. Doesn't it seem almost as if the killer has a sort of sneaking fondness for his victim, and is pulling punches in spite of himself — or herself?"

"With Sherlock Holmes it was the needle," said the Inspector. "With you it's worse. You've been at those big books again."

"No, Oscar. I've had a most active afternoon. I was squirted with soda water by Brock's ex-wife, who sincerely hopes he'll be boiled in oil. I've been laughed at by Bob Stevens, who used to be Brock's partner but got shuffled off, and who has a big expensive house on Long Island but wears a threadbare Brooks Brothers suit."

Piper listened, nodding. "Nadia needs some looking into. She's suspect Number One, according to Jonesy. The secretary pointed out that if Nadia flew here yesterday she could have done it before, and pulled those stunts . . ."

"The wife and secretary waste no love on one another, do they? But of the two I prefer Nadia."

"Well, Jonesy hates to see her boss get back in Nadia's clutches. She really hit the ceiling when I let it slip accidentally on purpose about where

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the dancer spent the night. But as I told her, the ex-Mrs. Brock has no motive."

"None that I could figure out — until last night. If anything happened to him now she might make a case for her being the legal widow. Only I think she really loves him."

"She loves him — but she wants him boiled in oil?"

"Exactly. Her pride is hurt. She came rushing back for a reconciliation and something went wrong. A woman scorned —" Miss Withers frowned. "By the way, Oscar, have you detectives trailing the principals in this affair?"

"As a matter of fact, I have. Except for Nadia — I didn't know where she was. But I'll attend to that right now." And he did, with a phone call. "Go on, Hildegarde. What other mischief did you get into today?"

"I made a trip up to 125th Street to pay a call on Verzine, the scrubwoman. It seems that the poison in the cognac she drank burned out her stomach lining, and the poor thing is living on crackers and milk, unable to work. My next stop was the American Museum of Natural History, where I spent some time looking at the habitat groups. Then I put in an hour on the 47th Street subway platform, just watching the trains go by, and I found time to stroll in Central Park and watch the equestrians. I was even whistled at by two sailors who were riding horseback."

"I thought," said the Inspector through a mouthful of sandwich, "that you had to have 20/20 vision to get in the Navy?"

Miss Withers gave him a look. "Well, they were riding side-saddle, and I'll concede that they might just possibly have been celebrating."

"Never mind, Hildegarde," he told her kindly. "I'll whistle at you any old time if you'll only get this Brock case settled."

"Oh, but it is," said the schoolteacher slowly. "At least there won't be any more attempts on Brock's life."

"What? How can you be so sure of that?"

"I just am. Besides, I talked to him on the phone and he's going to get out of town, first thing in the morning. He has a fishing lodge up in Maine . . ."

Piper suddenly stood up. "Have you lost your wits? A killer can strike up there just as well as —"

"Relax, Oscar."

"What do you mean 'relax'? Am I supposed to mark the case *Closed* just on your say-so, just because you've had a hunch or something —" At that moment the phone rang. "Inspector Piper speaking . . . okay then. Report back to your precinct." He turned, looking happier. "Anyway, we can scratch out one suspect. Brock's ex-wife checked out of the Hotel Griffon half an hour ago, headed for the airport."

"But — but that means she's going back to Hollywood! I don't like it —"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, I like it fine. The more people in the Brock case who leave my jurisdiction the better!"

"But Oscar, I'm worried."

"What's the matter, did you read the tea leaves wrong or something?"

"I still wish you'd put the Jones woman in custody, just for tonight."

"But why? She can't pull any fast ones, with Officer Purdy on her tail."

"Couldn't you have him bring her in for questioning or something, and then hold her here, for her own protection?"

The Inspector gave her a sharp look. "I suppose I could, next time he gets a chance to phone in. But why should I?"

"Because — well, I just realized how ugly this thing can be. Perhaps —"

"Perhaps you've been barking up the wrong tree again, huh?"

"Thank you very much for the sandwich!" Miss Withers snapped, and departed slamming the office door. She hurried back uptown, and rang the bell of Roscoe Brock's apartment. This time it opened immediately.

"Oh, it's you," he said, his round boyish face falling a little. That meant he expected someone else. Jonesy — no, not she. That meant he didn't know Nadia had left town. "Come in," Brock invited, pointing at the pile of fishing rods and tackle in the hall. "You see I'm taking your advice. It'll be wonderful up in Maine this time of year. Those land-locked salmon —"

"I," said Miss Withers, "am a fisher of men."

"But it still seems somehow like running away."

"My grandmother always said that he who fights and runs away will live to fight another day. You're planning to leave early?"

"The sooner the better. I've a lot of packing to do, and Jonesy is on her way up here with some important papers from the office. She's also going to pick up my car at the garage and bring it over — I thought maybe I'd better stay locked in here until I take off, just in case . . ."

"Very prudent," murmured the schoolteacher. A complete set of little red lights were now flashing their warnings in the back of her mind, but she didn't quite know what to do about them. Then she saw that Brock had his checkbook out.

"By the way, I suppose I owe you something for your help in all this?"

"Nothing at all," said the schoolteacher. "Under the circumstances. But if you do feel any obligation I wish you'd send the check to that unfortunate scrubwoman. She's really in quite desperate straits, you know."

"The woman asked for it, didn't she? Taking things from wastebaskets . . ." The doorbell rang, and Brock excused himself. He came back in a minute or so, tucking something into his pocket and smiling, Miss Withers thought, like the cat that ate the canary. "Telegram," he explained. "Just business. Now what were we talking about?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Verzine, the scrubwoman who drank the poisoned cognac."

"Oh, of course! I'll have Jonesy send her something tomorrow."

"Your secretary isn't going up to Loon Lake with you, then?"

He snorted. "Lord, no — not now. I mean, I see enough of her at the office. I did take her on a trip once last spring — it was to Bermuda — and she was in a perpetual tizzy because she thought I was being overcharged. For everything."

"I — I see." Still somewhat uneasy, Miss Withers took her departure. Back at her own apartment she aired her gangling apricot poodle and then in desperation set about washing her hair, always a last resort at moments like this. Before it was half-dried she was on the telephone. Her last call was to the Inspector who turned out to be still at his office. "Oscar, I just called to see if you did what I asked about putting Mrs. Jones in protective custody?"

"The answer is no."

"Oh, dear. Because I called the Hotel Griffon, and just before Nadia checked out she had a call — from a woman. It's obvious that Jonesy has been doing her best to prevent the reconciliation in the Brock family."

"Relax, Hildegarde," said the Inspector. "You're behind the times. But the reason we didn't pick up Mrs. Jones — well, it was one of those things. Purdy lost her. He's a good cop, but she went into the ladies' room at the Astor and must have come out another door. It could have been on purpose or just an accident."

"Oh, dear!"

"That's not all. We checked the airport, and Nadia Nordica didn't take a plane for Los Angeles. She left at seven this evening via Eastern Airlines for Bangor."

"Bangor, Maine? Of course! That's what the telegram was about. Then perhaps everything is going to be all right, after all!"

The Inspector started to say something about Hildegarde and her happy endings, but Miss Withers cut in with — "I'd be considerably happier if I knew where Mrs. Jones was right now. I suppose you tried her apartment?"

"Don't try to teach your grandmother to suck eggs. Of course. No dice."

"Did you try Mr. Brock's apartment?"

"We called there too. She'd been there, to deliver some important office papers that he wanted to take with him, but she'd left."

"How about the office down on Wall Street?"

Piper snorted. "Are you nuts? Why would she be there, at this hour?"

"Oscar, you don't understand. It's the only real home she has. Please —"

"Now don't give me that. I'm a patient man, but — you're not trying to hint that Jonesy was the one who took a pot-shot at Brock, sent him the queer cognac, pushed him off the subway platform, and mailed him the snake? Because —"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh, no! Contrariwise. This is a queer case, Oscar. Skim milk masquerades as cream and things are seldom what they seem. But murder is a two-edged sword, not to be fooled with. And if you act out the shadow often enough, it well may become the substance. I have a premonition . . ."

"You and your crystal ball! Hildegarde, go to bed and sleep it off." The Inspector hung up forcefully. Enough was enough. It was time to call it a day. But still, when he came out onto the street, he told the taxi-driver to take him downtown, instead of northward to his home.

It was the sort of a case where it was worthwhile to eliminate all the blind alleys . . . Then he found that there were lights still on in the offices of Roscoe Brock Enterprises, though the rest of the building was in darkness. He hammered on the door. "Open up — it's the Law!"

But nobody opened. By and by he went back downstairs and got the nightwatchman with his keys, and later still he put through a call to Miss Hildegarde Withers, who had taken his advice and was deep in slumber.

"You and your premonitions!" he said savagely. "We found Mrs. Millicent Jones sprawled over her boss's desk, more dead than alive. The ambulance men say it's some metallic poison, and she has about one chance in five."

"Oh!" said Miss Withers ineffectually. "Oh, dear! Then there must have been something planted there — perhaps the poison was in the water bottle on his desk, where she'd help herself . . ."

"I knew if we fooled around with this mess long enough there'd be a murder," said the Inspector grimly. "Save it. I'm picking you up in ten minutes, and then we're going to get to the bottom of this."

The schoolteacher was ready and waiting on the steps when the big black Headquarters car came up the street. The Inspector opened the door, with a grim invitation. "Get in, and talk fast," he said. "This isn't funny."

"I thought the answer was obvious enough, even for you," she said.

"You mean to say that Brock got wise to the fact that his love-sick secretary had been trying to kill him, and got back at her by planting poison in the office hoping she'd take it accidentally? Horsefeathers!"

"Horsefeathers indeed," said Miss Withers. "Oscar, if only —" But the howling of the siren drowned out her voice. They cut down to Central Park South, and pulled up outside the apartment house with a jerk that jarred her back teeth. The Inspector was out of the car before it stopped rolling, but the bird was flown. The startled man at the desk said that Mr. Brock had left for his place in Maine fifteen minutes ago. In his yellow Lagonda.

"Oh, sure!" snarled Piper, biting through his cigar. "Any place but! He'll ditch the car, too —"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No, Oscar." Miss Withers was tugging at his sleeve. "Brock is really going to Loon Lake — because Nadia is waiting for him there."

"Judas priest in a whirlwind! Will you —"

"I thought that by this time you must have realized that Brock faked all those attacks on his life. Didn't you suspect that at all?"

"Of course I did!" he roared. "But he couldn't push himself off the subway platform!"

"I can explain even that —"

"Explain it in the car," he told her roughly, and pushed her back inside. Then he paused to detail one of his men to send out a general alarm for Roscoe Brock. "We'll go after him. If he's headed for Maine he'll take the Parkways as far as New Haven, and maybe —" They roared away again.

Between screams of the official siren Miss Withers said, "He could jump off the subway platform in front of a train — if he knew that ten-car expresses always stop at a certain point. Brock was too familiar with that subway platform for a man who claimed to have only been there once. He must have spent hours . . ."

They careened around a corner, missing a street car by a whisker, and snapped through an intersection like a scene in an old Mack Sennett comedy. "Of course," the schoolteacher went on, "Brock wasn't wearing his hat when he shot the hole through it. People who ride horseback jam their hats low down or else they'll jostle off. The cognac and the snake were easier still — it wasn't even a real coral snake, though he tried to make me think so. Up at the Museum they have mounted snakes — coral snakes and also the harmless canebrake adders that look just like them only the colors are reversed . . ."

The Headquarters car swerved onto Riverside Drive, and then on and through a toll-gate without hesitating. "Keep talking," demanded the Inspector. "Make it good. Why would a man go through all that monkey-business . . ."

"It's obvious, Oscar. Because he wanted desperately to win back his ex-wife. He'd tried everything else, and failed. But Nadia is the dramatic type, and he thought she might respond to drama. If she heard about his narrow escapes she'd come back to him — as, in fact, she did. Only she saw through him, and that cut his pride to the quick. By that time Roscoe Brock was carried away with his play-acting. She simply *had* to acknowledge that he'd been in great peril. The night they spent together was spent quarreling, and he decided to fake one more attack, this time with a witness in the person of an insurance investigator — meaning me. He was determined, like so many liars, to make his lie stick. Of course he must have had that harmless snake packed and ready for days . . ."

The detective who sat beside the driver was in radio-telephone communication with the suburban centers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

through which they were racing. White Plains, he said, had just reported that a yellow car, foreign-make, had gone past the Sawmill River turnoff headed northeast.

"That's him!" cried the Inspector, and for once Miss Withers refrained from correcting his grammar.

"They want to know should they call ahead to set up a road-block?" asked the detective.

"No," decided Piper. "We'll catch up. I want to handle this thing personal." He turned toward the schoolteacher, a little easier. "All right, I'll buy it so far," he conceded. "But why should Brock want to poison his secretary?"

"I — I don't know," she admitted honestly. "Especially now. At one time I thought — well, he obviously must have been comforting himself with Mrs. Jones after his wife left him. That was almost inevitable, for a man like Brock. But suppose Jonesy took it seriously, and kept on taking it that way even after he wanted the interlude closed? When she talked to me she twice mentioned what a little boy he was, and that's always a bad sign. She knitted socks for his birthday, and she fussed about the cigars he smoked. You yourself said that the woman stuck like a cocklebur when she wanted something. I *was* thinking that Brock might have come to the conclusion that Jonesy had to be removed from the picture if he hoped to get Nadia back, but . . ."

The Inspector's hand was tight on her arm. "There goes the son of a —"

"Oscar!" But sure enough, their lights stabbed at a low-slung yellow car far up ahead.

"Kick it!" ordered the Inspector.

They were doing 80 already, but the driver kicked it up to 90.

"Hit the howler!"

The siren screamed, but the gap between them and the yellow Lagonda remained the same. Then suddenly the voice of the police dispatcher back in White Plains came booming through the air. "Calling New York HQ Car Three Inspector Piper, your office reports Millicent Jones just died Bellevue Hospital from poisoning thought to be *mercuric flumerin.* There's more coming in . . ."

"Never mind the rest," ordered Piper "It's *murder* now! Keep the siren on."

The yellow Lagonda was actually drawing a little away from them, in spite of the fact that this section of the Parkway was full of wide curves. Miss Withers clutched the Inspector with a deathlike grip, praying as she had never prayed before. But her eyes could not tear themselves from that tiny red tail-light ahead.

Suddenly it went up into the air, and vanished. Then their headlights caught a blinding vision of the great yellow car turning end over end, rocketing across the highway to smash against the guard-rail — like a garden snail flung against a stone. Somehow their driver managed to fishtail the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

big Headquarters limousine to a standstill, brakes screaming.

But it was all over. There was nothing for them to do except set up red flares to warn off other traffic, and to call in for the meat wagon and the wrecker. Miss Hildegarde Withers had no part in all this. She sat alone in the back seat of the limousine.

A startled scream escaped her lips as the radio suddenly boomed out again. "This is White Plains. Still standing by, New York HQ Car Three? Here's the rest of message. Before she died Millicent Jones confessed taking poison out of remorse for having murdered her employer, Roscoe Brock. That is all."

"Oscar!" cried the schoolteacher.

The Inspector finally heard her, and came back. His voice was bitter. "A blowout," he explained.

Breathlessly she told him about the radio message. "But it doesn't make sense! How could Jonesy murder Mr. Brock when she was already dead?"

"Neat," the Inspector said. "Very, very neat. The three remaining tires on that fancy imported heap are all inflated to over a hundred instead of the normal thirty-two pounds. He was a cinch to crack up on one of those curves at high speed. She fixed him good."

Miss Wither subsided into a silence that lasted until they were heading back toward the city. "I think I see it all now, Oscar. When you came down to get Mrs. Jones and put her in protective custody — because of my hunch that she was in danger — she thought you were arresting her for murder. So she took poison."

"Go on. It's your case."

"If Jonesy couldn't have him, nobody could. Of course! That has to be it. She got the idea from Brock's own fake accidents. That's the trouble with playing with murder — it's apt to come true. Naturally she thought that she was going up to Maine with her boss. And then when he got the telegram telling him that his ex-wife was flying up to meet him there for another honeymoon, he told Jonesy to go back to her typewriter."

"Sure," said the Inspector.

"And now Brock's money will go to that distant cousin who's a medical missionary out in Korea, and also you owe me a new hat!"

"Which will look just as funny as the old ones," the Inspector reminded her. "And hold your horses before you get carried away with the idea of a happy ending. If Brock's ex-wife really spent the night with him and invalidated her interlocutory decree, then she's the widow, and she gets —"

"She gets her just desserts, which is nothing. Don't forget, Oscar, I have her own word for it. He wouldn't let her in."

Watch EQ on TV

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE CREATIVE IMPULSE

by W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

I SUPPOSE THAT VERY FEW PEOPLE know how Mrs. Albert Forrester came to write *The Achilles Statue;* and since it has been acclaimed as one of the great novels of our time I cannot but think that a brief account of the circumstances that gave it birth must be of interest to all serious students of literature; and indeed, if, as the critics say, this is a book that will live, the following narrative, serving a better purpose than to divert an idle hour, may be regarded by the historian of the future as a curious footnote to the literary annals of our day.

Everyone of course remembers the success that attended the publication of *The Achilles Statue.* Month after month printers were kept busy printing, binders were kept busy binding, edition after edition; and the publishers, both in England and America, were hard put to it to fulfil the pressing orders of the booksellers. It was promptly translated into every European tongue and it has been recently announced that it will soon be possible to read it in Japanese and in Urdu. But it had previously appeared serially in magazines on both sides of the Atlantic and from the editors of these Mrs. Albert Forrester's agent had wrung a sum that can only be described as thumping. A dramatization of the work was made, which ran for a season in New York, and there is little doubt that when the play is produced in London it will have an equal success. The film rights have been sold at a great price. Though the amount that Mrs. Albert Forrester is reputed (in literary circles) to have made is probably exaggerated, there can be no doubt that she will have earned enough money from this one book to save her for the rest of her life from any financial anxiety.

It is not often that a book meets with equal favor from the public and the critics, and that she, of all persons, had (if I may so put it) squared the circle must have proved the more gratifying to Mrs. Albert Forrester, since, though she had received the commendation of the critics in no grudging terms (and indeed had come to look upon it as her due) the public had always remained strangely insensible to her merit. Each work she published, a slender volume beautifully printed and bound in white buckram, was hailed as a masterpiece, always to the length of a column, and, in the weekly reviews which you see only in the dusty library of a very long-established club, even to the extent of a page; and all well-read persons read and praised it. But well-read persons apparently do not buy books, and she did not sell. It

Copyright, 1926, by W. Somerset Maugham

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was indeed a scandal that so distinguished an author, with an imagination so delicate and a style so exquisite, should remain neglected of the vulgar. In America, she was almost completely unknown; and though Mr. Carl Van Vechten had written an article berating the public for its obtuseness, the public remained callous. Her agent, a warm admirer of her genius, had blackmailed an American publisher into taking two of her books by refusing, unless he did so, to let him have others (trashy novels, doubtless) that he badly wanted, and they had been duly published. The reception they received from the press was flattering and showed that in America the best minds were sensitive to her talent; but when it came to the third book the American publisher (in the coarse way publishers have) told the agent that any money he had to spare he preferred to spend on synthetic gin.

Since *The Achilles Statue* Mrs. Albert Forrester's previous books have been republished (and Mr. Carl Van Vechten has written another article pointing out sadly, but firmly, that he had drawn the attention of the reading world to the merits of this exceptional writer fully fifteen years ago), and they have been so widely advertised that they can scarcely have escaped the cultured reader's attention. It is unnecessary, therefore, for me to give an account of them; and it would certainly be no more than cold potatoes after those two subtle articles by Mr. Carl Van Vechten. Mrs. Albert Forrester began to write early. Her first work (a volume of elegies) appeared when she was a maiden of eighteen; and published, every two or three years, for she had too exalted a conception of her art to hurry her production, a volume either of verse or prose. When *The Achilles Statue* was written she had reached the respectable age of 57, so that it will be readily surmised that the number of her works was considerable. She had given the world half a dozen volumes of verse, published under Latin titles, such as *Felicitas*, *Pax Maris* and *Aes Triplex* all of the graver kind, for her muse, disinclined to skip on a light, fantastic toe, trod a somewhat solemn measure. She remained faithful to the Elegy, and the Sonnet claimed much of her attention; but her chief distinction was to revive the Ode, a form of poetry that the poets of the present day somewhat neglect; and it may be asserted with confidence that her *Ode to President Fallières* will find a place in every anthology of English verse. It is admirable not only for the noble sonority of its rhythms, but also for its felicitous description of the pleasant land of France. Mrs. Albert Forrester wrote of the valley of the Loire with its memories of Du Bellay, of Chartres and the jewelled windows of its cathedral, of the sun-swept cities of Provence, with a sympathy all the more remarkable since she had never penetrated farther into France than Boulogne, which she visited shortly after

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her marriage on an excursion steamer from Margate. But the physical mortification of being extremely seasick and the intellectual humiliation of discovering that the inhabitants of that popular seaside resort could not understand her fluent and idiomatic French made her determine not to expose herself a second time to experiences which were at once undignified and unpleasant; and she never again embarked on the treacherous element which she however sang (*Pax Maris*) in numbers both grave and sweet.

There are some fine passages too in the *Ode to Woodrow Wilson*, and I regret that, owing to a change in her sentiments towards that no doubt excellent man, the author decided not to reprint it. But I think it must be admitted that Mrs. Albert Forrester's most distinguished work was in prose. She wrote several volumes of brief but perfectly constructed essays on such subjects as Autumn in Sussex, Queen Victoria, Death, Spring in Norfolk, Georgian Architecture, Monsieur de Diaghileff and Dante; she also wrote works, both erudite and whimsical, on the Jesuit Architecture of the XVIIth Century, and on the Literary Aspect of the Hundred Years' War. It was her prose that gained her that body of devoted admirers, fit though few, as with her rare gift of phrase she herself put it, that proclaimed her the greatest master of the English language that this century has seen. She admitted herself that it was her style, sonorous yet racy, polished yet eloquent, that was her strong point; and it was only in her prose that she had occasion to exhibit the delicious but restrained humor that her readers found so irresistible. It was not a humor of ideas, nor even a humor of words; it was much more subtle than that, it was a humor of punctuation: in a flash of inspiration she had discovered the comic possibilities of the semicolon, and of this she had made abundant and exquisite use. She was able to place it in such a way that if you were a person of culture with a keen sense of humor, you did not exactly laugh through a horse-collar, but you giggled delightedly, and the greater your culture the more delightedly you giggled. Her friends said that it made every other form of humor coarse and exaggerated. Several writers had tried to imitate her; but in vain: whatever else you might say about Mrs. Albert Forrester you were bound to admit that she was able to get every ounce of humor out of the semicolon and no one else could get within a mile of her.

Mrs. Albert Forrester lived in a flat not far from the Marble Arch, which combined the advantage of a good address and a moderate rent. It had a handsome drawing-room on the street and a large bedroom for Mrs. Albert Forrester, a darkish dining-room at the back and a small poky bedroom, next door to the kitchen, for Mr. Albert Forrester, who paid the rent. It was in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

handsome drawing-room that Mrs. Albert Forrester every Tuesday afternoon received her friends. It was a severe and chaste apartment. On the walls was a paper designed by William Morris himself and on this, in plain black frames, mezzotints collected before mezzotints grew expensive; the furniture was of the Chippendale period, but for the roll-top desk, vaguely Louis XVI in character, at which Mrs. Albert Forrester wrote her works. This was pointed out to visitors the first time they came to see her, and there were few who looked at it without emotion. The carpet was thick and the lights discreet. Mrs. Albert Forrester sat in a straight-backed grandfather's chair covered with red damask. There was nothing ostentatious about it, but since it was the only comfortable chair in the room it set her apart as it were and above her guests. Tea was dispensed by a female of uncertain age, silent and colorless, who was never introduced to anyone but who was known to look upon it as a privilege to be allowed to save Mrs. Albert Forrester from the irksome duty of pouring out tea. She was thus able to devote herself entirely to conversation, and it must be admitted that her conversation was excellent. It was not sprightly; and since it is difficult to indicate punctuation in speech it may have seemed to some slightly lacking in humor, but it was of wide range, solid, instructive and interesting. Mrs. Albert Forrester was well acquainted with social science, jurisprudence and theology. She had read much and her memory was retentive. She had a pretty gift for quotation, which is a serviceable substitute for wit, and having for 30 years known more or less intimately a great many distinguished people, she had a great many interesting anecdotes to tell, which she placed with tact and which she did not repeat more than was pardonable. Mrs. Albert Forrester had the gift of attracting the most varied persons, and you were liable at one and the same time to meet in her drawing-room an ex-prime minister, a newspaper proprietor and the ambassador of a First Class Power. I always imagined that these great people came because they thought that here they rubbed shoulders with Bohemia, but with a Bohemia sufficiently neat and clean for them to be in no danger that the dirt would come off on them. Mrs. Albert Forrester was deeply interested in politics and I myself heard a cabinet minister tell her frankly that she had a masculine intelligence. She had been opposed to female suffrage, but when it was at last granted to women she began to dally with the idea of going into Parliament. Her difficulty was that she did not know which party to choose.

"After all," she said, with a playful shrug of her somewhat massive shoulders, "I cannot form a party of one."

Like many serious patriots, in her inability to know for certain which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

way the cat would jump she held her political opinions in suspense; but of late she had been definitely turning towards Labour as the best hope of the country, and if a safe seat were offered her it was felt fairly certain that she would not hesitate to come out into the open as a champion of the oppressed proletariat.

Her drawing-room was always open to foreigners, to Czecho-Slovaks, Italians and Frenchmen if they were distinguished and to Americans even if they were obscure. But she was not a snob and you seldom met there a duke unless he was of a peculiarly serious turn and a peeress only if in addition to her rank she had the passport of some small social solecism such as having been divorced, written a novel or forged a check, which might give her a claim on Mrs. Albert Forrester's Catholic Sympathies. She did not much care for painters, who were shy and silent; and musicians did not interest her: even if they consented to play — and if they were celebrated they were too often reluctant — their music was a hindrance to conversation: if people wanted to hear music they could go to a concert; for her part she preferred the more subtle music of the soul. But her hospitality to writers, especially if they were promising and little known, was warm and constant. She had an eye for budding talent and there were few of the famous writers who from time to time drank a dish of tea with her whose first efforts she had not encouraged and whose early steps she had not guided. Her own position was too well assured for her to be capable of envy, and she had heard the word genius attached to her name too often to feel a trace of jealousy because the talents of others brought them a material success that was denied to her.

Mrs. Albert Forrester, confident in the judgment of posterity, could afford to be disinterested. With these elements then it is no wonder that she had succeeded in creating something as near the French salon of the Eighteenth Century as our barbarous nation has ever reached. To be invited to "eat a bun and drink a cup of tea on Tuesday" was a privilege that few failed to recognize; and when you sat on your Chippendale chair in the discreetly lit but austere room, you could not but feel that you were living literary history. The American ambassador once said to Mrs. Albert Forrester:

"A cup of tea with you, Mrs. Forrester, is one of the richest intellectual treats which it has ever been my lot to enjoy."

It was indeed on occasion a trifle overwhelming. Mrs. Albert Forrester's taste was so perfect, she so inevitably admired the right thing and made the just observation about it, that sometimes you almost gasped for air. For my part I found it prudent to fortify myself with a cocktail or two before I exposed myself to the rarefied atmosphere of her society. Indeed, I very nearly found myself

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

forever excluded from it, for one afternoon, presenting myself at the door, instead of asking the maid who opened it: "Is Mrs. Forrester at home?" I asked: "Is there Divine Service today?"

Of course it was said in pure inadvertence, but it was unfortunate that the maid sniggered and one of Mrs. Albert Forrester's most devoted admirers, Ellen Hannaway, happened to be at the moment in the hall taking off her galoshes. She told my hostess what I had said before I got into the drawing-room, and as I entered Mrs. Albert Forrester fixed me with an eagle eye.

"Why did you ask if there was Divine Service today?" she inquired.

I explained that I was absent-minded, but Mrs. Albert Forrester held me with a gaze that I can only describe as compelling.

"Do you mean to suggest that my parties are . . ." She searched for a word. "Sacramental?"

I did not know what she meant, but did not like to show my ignorance before so many clever people, and I decided that the only thing was to seize my trowel and the butter.

"Your parties are like you, dear lady, perfectly beautiful and perfectly divine."

A little tremor passed through Mrs. Albert Forrester's substantial frame. She was like a man who enters suddenly a room filled with hyacinths; the perfume is so intoxicating that he almost staggers. But she relented.

"If you were trying to be facetious," she said, "I should prefer you to exercise your facetiousness on my guests rather than on my maids. . . . Miss Warren will give you some tea."

Mrs. Albert Forrester dismissed me with a wave of the hand, but she did not dismiss the subject, since for the next two or three years whenever she introduced me to someone she never failed to add:

"You must make the most of him, he only comes here as a penance. When he comes to the door he always asks: 'Is there Divine Service today?' So amusing, isn't he?"

But Mrs. Albert Forrester did not confine herself to weekly tea-parties: every Saturday she gave a luncheon of eight persons; this according to her opinion being the perfect number for general conversation and her dining-room conveniently holding no more. If Mrs. Albert Forrester flattered herself upon anything it was not that her knowledge of English prosody was unique, but that her luncheons were celebrated. She chose her guests with care and an invitation to one of them was more than a compliment, it was a consecration. Over the luncheon-table it was possible to keep the conversation on a higher level than in the mixed company of a tea-party; and few can have left her dining-room without taking away with them an enhanced belief in Mrs. Albert Forrester's ability and a brighter faith in human nature. She only asked men, since, stout enthusiast for her sex as she

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was and glad to see women on other occasions, she could not but realize that they were inclined at table to talk exclusively to their next-door neighbors and thus hinder the general exchange of ideas that made her own parties an entertainment not only of the body but of the soul. For it must be said that Mrs. Albert Forrester gave you uncommonly good food, excellent wine and a first-rate cigar. Now to anyone who has partaken of literary hospitality this must appear very remarkable, since literary persons for the most part think highly and live plainly; their minds are occupied with the things of the spirit and they do not notice that the roast mutton is underdone and the potatoes cold: the beer is all right, but the wine has a sobering effect, and it is unwise to touch the coffee. Mrs. Albert Forrester was pleased enough to receive compliments on the fare she provided.

"If people do me the honor to break bread with me," she said," it is only fair that I should give them as good food as they can get at home."

But if the flattery was excessive she deprecated it.

"You really embarrass me when you give me a meed of praise which is not my due. You must praise Mrs. Bulfinch."

"Who is Mrs. Bulfinch?"

"My cook."

"She's a treasure then, but you're not going to ask me to believe that she's responsible for the wine."

"Is it good? I'm terribly ignorant of such things; I put myself entirely in the hands of my wine-merchant."

But if mention was made of the cigars Mrs. Albert Forrester beamed.

"Ah, for them you must compliment Albert. It is Albert who chooses the cigars and I am given to understand that no one knows more about a cigar than Albert."

She looked at her husband, who sat at the end of the table, with the proud bright eyes of a pedigree hen (a Buff Orpington for choice) looking at her only chick. Then there was a quick flutter of conversation as the guests, anxious to be civil to their host and relieved at length to find an occasion, expressed their appreciation of his peculiar merit.

"You're very kind," he said. "I'm glad you like them."

Then he would give a little discourse on cigars, explaining the excellences he sought and regretting the deterioration in quality which had followed on the commercialization of the industry. Mrs. Albert Forrester listened to him with a complacent smile, and it was plain that she enjoyed this little triumph of his. Of course you cannot go on talking of cigars indefinitely, and as soon as she perceived that her guests were growing restive she broached a topic of more general, and it may be of more significant, interest. Albert subsided into silence. But he had had his moment.

It was Albert who made Mrs. Forrester's luncheons to some less attractive than her tea-parties, for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Albert was a bore; but though without doubt perfectly conscious of the fact, she made a point that he should come to them and in fact had fixed upon Saturdays (for the rest of the week he was busy) in order that he should be able to. Mrs. Albert Forrester felt that her husband's presence on these festive occasions was an unavoidable debt that she paid to her own self-respect. She would never by a negligence admit to the world that she had married a man who was not spiritually her equal, and it may be that in the silent watches of the night she asked herself where indeed such could have been found. Mrs. Albert Forrester's friends were troubled by no such reticence and they said it was dreadful that such a woman should be burdened with such a man. They asked one another how she had ever come to marry him and (being most celibate) answered despairingly that no one ever knew why anybody married anybody else.

It was not that Albert was a verbose and aggressive bore; he did not buttonhole you with interminable stories or pester you with pointless jokes; he did not crucify you on a platitude or hamstring you with a commonplace; he was just dull. A cipher. Clifford Boyleston, for whom the French Romantics had no secrets and who was himself a writer of merit, had said that when you looked into a room into which Albert had just gone there was nobody there. This was thought very clever by Mrs. Albert Forrester's friends, and Rose Waterford, the well-known novelist and the most fearless of women, had ventured to repeat it to Mrs. Albert Forrester. Though she pretended to be annoyed, she had not been able to prevent the smile that rose to her lips. Her behavior towards Albert could not but increase the respect in which her friends held her. She insisted that whatever in their secret hearts they thought of him, they should treat him with the decorum that was due to her husband. Her own demeanor was admirable. If he chanced to make an observation she listened to him with a pleasant expression, and when he fetched her a book that she wanted or gave her his pencil to make a note of an idea that had occurred to her, she always thanked him. Nor would she allow her friends pointedly to neglect him, and though, being a woman of tact, she saw that it would be asking too much of the world if she took him about with her always, and she went out much alone, yet her friends knew that she expected them to ask him to dinner at least once a year. He always accompanied her to public banquets when she was going to make a speech, and if she delivered a lecture she took care that he should have a seat on the platform.

Albert was, I believe, of average height, but perhaps because you never thought of him except in connection with his wife (of imposing dimensions) you only thought of him as a little man. He was spare and frail and looked older than his age. This was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the same as his wife's. His hair, which he kept very short, was white and meagre, and he wore a stubby white mustache; his was a face, thin and lined, without a noticeable feature; and his blue eyes, which once might have been attractive, were now pale and tired. He was always very neatly dressed in pepper-and-salt trousers, which he chose always of the same pattern, a black coat and a gray tie with a small pearl pin in it. He was perfectly unobtrusive, and when he stood in Mrs. Albert Forrester's drawing-room to receive the guests whom she had asked to luncheon you noticed him as little as you noticed the quiet and gentlemanly furniture. He was well-mannered and it was with a pleasant, courteous smile that he shook hands with them.

"How do you do? I'm very glad to see you," he said if they were friends of some standing. "Keeping well, I hope?"

But if they were strangers of distinction coming for the first time to the house, he went to the door as they entered the drawing-room, and said:

"I am Mrs. Albert Forrester's husband. I will introduce you to my wife."

Then he led the visitor to where Mrs. Albert Forrester stood, with her back to the light, and she with a glad and eager gesture advanced to make the stranger welcome.

It was agreeable to see the demure pride he took in his wife's literary reputation and the self-effacement with which he furthered her interests. He was always there when he was wanted and never when he wasn't. His tact, if not deliberate, was instinctive. Mrs. Albert Forrester was the first to acknowledge his merits.

"I really don't know what I should do without him," she said. "He's invaluable to me. I read him everything I write and his criticisms are often very useful."

"Molière and his cook," said Miss Waterford.

"Is that funny, dear Rose?" asked Mrs. Forrester, somewhat acidly.

When Mrs. Albert Forrester did not approve of a remark, she had a way, that put many persons to confusion, of asking you whether it was a joke which she was too dense to see. But it was impossible to embarrass Miss Waterford. She was a lady who in the course of a long life had had many affairs, but only one passion, and this was for printer's ink. Mrs. Albert Forrester tolerated rather than approved her.

"Come, come, my dear," she replied, "you know very well that he wouldn't exist without you. He wouldn't know us. It must be wonderful to him to come in contact with all the best brains and the most distinguished people of our day."

"It may be that the bee would perish without the hive which shelters it, but the bee nevertheless has a significance of its own."

And since Mrs. Albert Forrester's friends, though they knew all about art and literature, knew little about

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

natural history, they had no reply to this observation. She went on:

"He doesn't interfere with me. He knows subconsciously when I don't want to be disturbed and, indeed, when I am following out a train of thought I find his presence in the room a comfort rather than a hindrance to me."

"Like a Persian cat," said Miss Waterford.

"But like a very well-trained, well-bred, and well-mannered Persian cat," answered Mrs. Forrester severely, thus putting Miss Waterford in her place.

But Mrs. Albert Forrester had not finished with her husband.

"We who belong to the intelligentsia," she said, "are apt to live in a world too exclusively our own. We are interested in the abstract rather than in the concrete, and sometimes I think that we survey the bustling world of human affairs in too detached a manner and from too serene a height. Do you not think that we stand in danger of becoming a little inhuman? I shall always be grateful to Albert because he keeps me in contact with the man in the street."

It was on account of this remark, to which none of her friends could deny the rare insight and subtlety that characterized so many of her utterances, that for some time Albert was known in her immediate circle as The Man in the Street. But this was only for a while, and it was forgotten. He then became known as The Philatelist. It was Clifford Boyleston, with his wicked wit, who invented the name. One day, his poor brain exhausted by the effort to sustain a conversation with Albert, he had asked in desperation:

"Do you collect stamps?"

"No," answered Albert mildly. "I'm afraid I don't."

But Clifford Boyleston had no sooner asked the question than he saw its possibilities. He had written a book on Baudelaire's aunt by marriage, which had attracted the attention of all who were interested in French literature, and was well known in his exhaustive studies of the French spirit to have absorbed a goodly share of the Gallic quickness and the Gallic brilliancy. He paid no attention to Albert's disclaimer, but at the first opportunity informed Mrs. Albert Forrester's friends that he had at last discovered Albert's secret. He collected stamps. He never met him afterwards without asking him:

"Well, Mr. Forrester, how is the stamp collection?" Or: "Have you been buying any stamps since I saw you last?"

It mattered little that Albert continued to deny that he collected stamps, the invention was too apt not to be made the most of; Mrs. Albert Forrester's friends insisted that he did, and they seldom spoke to him without asking him how he was getting on. Even Mrs. Albert Forrester, when she was in a specially gay humor, would sometimes speak of her husband as The Philatelist.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The name really did seem to fit Albert like a glove. Sometimes they spoke of him thus to his face and they could not but appreciate the good nature with which he took it; he smiled unresentfully and presently did not even protest that they were mistaken.

Of course Mrs. Albert Forrester had too keen a social sense to jeopardize the success of her luncheons by allowing her more distinguished guests to sit on either side of Albert. She took care that only her older and more intimate friends should do this, and when the appointed victims came in she would say to them:

"I know you won't mind sitting by Albert, will you?"

They could only say that they would be delighted, but if their faces too plainly expressed their dismay she would pat their hands playfully and add:

"Next time you shall sit by me. Albert is so shy with strangers and you know so well how to deal with him."

They did: they simply ignored him. So far as they were concerned the chair in which he sat might as well have been empty. There was no sign that it annoyed him to be taken no notice of by persons who after all were eating food he paid for, since the earnings of Mrs. Forrester could certainly not have provided her guests with spring salmon and forced asparagus. He sat quiet and silent, and if he opened his mouth it was only to give a direction to one of the maids. If a guest were new to him he would let his eyes rest on him in a stare that would have been embarrassing if it had not been so childlike. He seemed to be asking himself what this strange creature was; but what answer his mild scrutiny gave him he never revealed. When the conversation grew animated he would look from from one speaker to the other, but again you could not tell from his thin, lined face what he thought of the fantastic notions that were bandied across the table.

Clifford Boyleston said that all the wit and wisdom he heard passed over his head like water over a duck's back. He had given up trying to understand and now only made a semblance of listening. But Harry Oakland, the versatile critic, said that Albert was taking it all in; he found it all too, too marvellous, and with his poor, muddled brain he was trying desperately to make head or tail of the wonderful things he heard. Of course in the city he must boast of the distinguished persons he knew; perhaps there he was a light of learning and letters, an authority on the ideal; it would be perfectly divine to hear what he made of it all. Harry Oakland was one of Mrs. Albert Forrester's staunchest admirers, and had written a brilliant and subtle essay on her style. With his refined and even beautiful features he looked like a San Sebastian who had had an accident with a hair restorer; for he was uncommonly hirsute. He was a very young man, not 30, but he had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

been in turn a dramatic critic, and a critic of fiction, a musical critic and a critic of painting. But he was getting a little tired of art and threatened to devote his talents in future to the criticism of sport.

Albert, I should explain, was in the city and it was a misfortune that Mrs. Forrester's friends thought she bore with meritorious fortitude that he was not even rich. There would have been something romantic in it if he had been a merchant prince who held the fate of nations in his hand or sent argosies, laden with rare spices, to those ports of the Levant, the names of which have provided many a poet with so rich and rare a rhyme. But Albert was only a currant-merchant and was supposed to make no more than just enabled Mrs. Albert Forrester to conduct her life with distinction and even with liberality. Since his occupation kept him in his office till 6 o'clock he never managed to get to Mrs. Albert Forrester's Tuesdays till the most important visitors were gone. By the time he arrived, there were seldom more than three or four of her more intimate friends in the drawing-room, discussing with freedom and humor the guests who had departed, and when they heard Albert's key in the front-door they realized with one accord that it was late. In a moment he opened the door and looked in. Mrs. Albert Forrester greeted him with a bright smile.

"Come in, Albert, come in. I think you know everybody here."

Albert entered and shook hands with his wife's friends.

"Have you just come from the city?" she asked eagerly, though she knew there was nowhere else he could have come from. "Would you like a cup of tea?"

"No, thank you, my dear. I had tea in my office."

Mrs. Albert Forrester smiled still more brightly and the rest of the company thought she was perfectly wonderful with him.

"Ah, but I know you like a second cup. I will pour it out for you myself."

She went to the tea-table and, forgetting that the tea had been stewing for an hour and a half and was stone cold, poured him out a cup and added milk and sugar. Albert took it with a word of thanks, and meekly stirred it, but when Mrs. Forrester resumed the conversation which his appearance had interrupted, without tasting it he put it quietly down. His arrival was the signal for the party finally to break up, and one by one the remaining guests took their departure. On one occasion, however, the conversation was so absorbing and the point at issue so important that Mrs. Albert Forrester would not hear of their going.

"It must be settled once and for all. And after all," she remarked in a manner that for her was almost arch, "this is a matter on which Albert may have something to say. Let us have the benefit of his opinion."

It was when women were beginning

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to cut their hair and the subject of discussion was whether Mrs. Albert Forrester should or should not shingle. Mrs. Albert Forrester was a woman of authoritative presence. She was large-boned and her bones were well covered; had she not been so tall and strong it might have suggested itself to you that she was corpulent. But she carried her weight gallantly. Her features were a little larger than life-size, and it was this that gave her face doubtless the look of virile intellectuality that it certainly possessed. Her skin was dark and you might have thought that she had in her veins some trace of Levantine blood: she admitted that she could not but think there was in her a gypsy strain and that would account, she felt, for the wild and lawless passion that sometimes characterized her poetry. Her eyes were large and black and bright, her nose like the great Duke of Wellington's, but more fleshy, and her chin square and determined. She had a big mouth, with full red lips, which owed nothing to cosmetics, for of these Mrs. Albert Forrester had never deigned to make use; and her hair, thick, solid and gray, was piled on the top of her head in such a manner as to increase her already commanding height. She was in appearance an imposing, not to say an alarming, female.

She was always very suitably dressed in rich materials of sombre hue and she looked every inch a woman of letters; but in her discreet way (being after all human and susceptible to vanity) she followed the fashions, and the cut of her gowns was modish. I think for some time she had hankered to shingle her hair, but she thought it more becoming to do it at the solicitation of her friends than on her own initiative.

"Oh, you must, you must," said Harry Oakland, in his eager, boyish way. "You'd look too, too wonderful."

Clifford Boyleston, who was now writing a book on Madame de Maintenon, was doubtful. He thought it a dangerous experiment.

"I think," he said, wiping his eyeglasses with a cambric handkerchief, "I think when one has made a type one should stick to it. What would Louis XIV have been without his wig?"

"I'm hesitating," said Mrs. Forrester. "After all, we must move with the times. I am of my day and I do not wish to lag behind. America, as Wilhelm Meister said, is here and now." She turned brightly to Albert. "What does my lord and master say about it? What is your opinion, Albert? To shingle or not to shingle, that is the question."

"I'm afraid my opinion is not of great importance, my dear," he answered mildly.

"To me it is of the greatest importance," answered Mrs. Albert Forrester, flatteringly.

She could not but see how beautifully her friends thought she treated The Philatelist.

"I insist," she proceeded, "I insist.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No one knows me as you do, Albert. Will it suit me?"

"It might," he answered. "My only fear is that with your — statuesque appearance short hair would perhaps suggest, well, shall we say, the Isle of Greece where burning Sappho loved and sung."

There was a moment's embarrassed pause. Rose Waterford smothered a giggle, but the others preserved a stony silence. Mrs. Forrester's smile froze on her lips. Albert had dropped a brick.

"I always thought Byron a very mediocre poet," said Mrs. Albert Forrester at last.

The company broke up. Mrs. Albert Forrester did not shingle, nor indeed was the matter ever again referred to.

It was towards the end of another of Mrs. Albert Forrester's Tuesdays that the event occurred that had so great an influence on her literary career.

It had been one of her most successful parties. The leader of the Labour Party had been there and Mrs. Albert Forrester had gone as far as she could without definitely committing herself to intimate to him that she was prepared to throw in her lot with Labour. The time was ripe and if she was ever to adopt a political career she must come to a decision. A member of the French Academy had been brought by Clifford Boyleston and, though she knew he was wholly unacquainted with English, it had gratified her to receive his affable compliment on her ornate and yet pellucid style. The American ambassador had been there and a young Russian prince whose authentic Romanoff blood alone prevented him from looking a gigolo. A duchess who had recently divorced her duke and married a jockey had been very gracious; and her strawberry leaves, albeit sere and yellow, undoubtedly added tone to the assembly. There had been quite a galaxy of literary lights. But now all, all were gone but Clifford Boyleston, Harry Oakland, Rose Waterford, Oscar Charles and Simmons. Oscar Charles was a little, gnome-like creature, young but with the wizened face of a cunning monkey, with gold spectacles, who earned his living in a government office but spent his leisure in the pursuit of literature. He wrote little articles for the sixpenny weeklies and had a spirited contempt for the world in general. Mrs. Albert Forrester liked him, thinking he had talent, but though he always expressed the keenest admiration for her style (it was indeed he who had named her the mistress of the semicolon), his acerbity was so general that she also somewhat feared him. Simmons was her agent; a round-faced man who wore glasses so strong that his eyes behind them looked strange and misshapen. They reminded you of the eyes of some uncouth crustacean that you had seen in an aquarium. He came regularly to Mrs. Albert Forrester's parties, partly because he had the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

greatest admiration for her genius and partly because it was convenient for him to meet prospective clients in her drawing-room.

Mrs. Albert Forrester, for whom he had long labored with but a trifling recompense, was not sorry to put him in the way of earning an honest penny, and she took care to introduce him, with warm expressions of gratitude, to anyone who might be supposed to have literary wares to sell. It was not without pride that she remembered that the notorious and vastly lucrative memoirs of Lady St. Swithin had been first mooted in her drawing-room.

They sat in a circle of which Mrs. Albert Forrester was the centre and discussed brightly, and, it must be confessed, somewhat maliciously the various persons who had been that day present. Miss Warren, the pallid female who had stood for two hours at the tea-table, was walking silently round the room collecting cups that had been left here and there. She had some vague employment, but was always able to get off in order to pour out tea for Mrs. Albert Forrester, and in the evening she typed Mrs. Albert Forrester's manuscripts. Mrs. Albert Forrester did not pay her for this, thinking quite rightly that as it was she did a great deal for the poor thing; but she gave her the seats for the cinema that were sent her for nothing and often presented her with articles of clothing for which she had no further use.

Mrs. Albert Forrester in her rather deep, full voice was talking in a steady flow and the rest were listening to her with attention. She was in good form and the words that poured from her lips could have gone straight down on paper without alteration. Suddenly there was a noise in the passage as though something heavy had fallen, and then the sound of an altercation.

Mrs. Albert Forrester stopped and a slight frown darkened her really noble brow.

"I should have thought they knew by now that I will not have this devastating racket in the flat. Would you mind ringing the bell, Miss Warren, and asking what is the reason of this tumult?"

Miss Warren rang the bell and in a moment the maid appeared. Miss Warren at the door, in order not to interrupt Mrs. Albert Forrester, spoke to her in undertones. But Mrs. Albert Forrester somewhat irritably interrupted herself.

"Well, Carter, what is it? Is the house falling down or has the Red Revolution at last broken out?"

"If you please, ma'am, it's the new cook's box," answered the maid. "The porter dropped it as he was bringing it in and the cook got all upset about it."

"What do you mean by the new cook?"

"Mrs. Bulfinch went away this afternoon, ma'am," said the maid.

Mrs. Albert Forrester stared at her.

"This is the first I've heard of it. Had Mrs. Bulfinch given notice?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The moment Mr. Forrester comes in tell him that I wish to speak to him."

"Very good, ma'am."

The maid went out and Miss Warren slowly returned to the tea-table. Mechanically, though nobody wanted them, she poured out several cups of tea.

"What a catastrophe!" cried Miss Waterford.

"You must get her back," said Clifford Boyleston. "She's a treasure, that woman, a remarkable cook, and she gets better and better every day."

But at that moment the maid came in again with a letter on a small plated salver and handed it to her mistress.

"What is this?" said Mrs. Albert Forrester.

"Mr. Forrester said I was to give you this letter when you asked for him, ma'am," said the maid.

"Where is Mr. Forrester then?"

"Mr. Forrester's gone, ma'am," answered the maid as though the question surprised her.

"Gone? That'll do. You can go."

The maid left the room and Mrs. Albert Forrester, with a look of perplexity on her large face, opened the letter. Rose Waterford has told me that her first thought was that Albert, fearful of his wife's displeasure at the departure of Mrs. Bulfinch, had thrown himself in the Thames. Mrs. Albert Forrester read the letter and a look of consternation crossed her face.

"Oh, monstrous," she cried. "Monstrous! Monstrous!"

"What is it, Mrs. Forrester?"

Mrs. Albert Forrester pawed the carpet with her foot like a restive, high-spirited horse pawing the ground, and crossing her arms with a gesture that is indescribable (but that you sometimes see in a fishwife who is going to make the very devil of a scene) bent her looks upon her curious and startled friends.

"Albert has eloped with the cook."

There was a gasp of dismay. Then something terrible happened. Miss Warren, who was standing behind the tea-table, suddenly choked. Miss Warren, who never opened her mouth and whom no one ever spoke to, Miss Warren, whom not one of them, though he had seen her every week for three years, would have recognized in the street, Miss Warren suddenly burst into uncontrollable laughter. With one accord, aghast, they turned and stared at her. They felt as Balaam must have felt when his ass broke into speech. She positively shrieked with laughter. There was a nameless horror about the sight, as though something had on a sudden gone wrong with a natural phenomenon, and you were just as startled as though the chairs and tables without warning began to skip about the floor in an antic dance. Miss Warren tried to contain herself, but the more she tried the more pitilessly the laughter shook her, and seizing a handkerchief she stuffed it in her mouth and hurried from the room. The door slammed behind her.

"Hysteria," said Clifford Boyleston.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Pure hysteria, of course," said Harry Oakland.

But Mrs. Albert Forrester said nothing.

The letter had dropped at her feet and Simmons, the agent, picked it up and handed it to her. She would not take it.

"Read it," she said. "Read it aloud."

Mr. Simmons pushed his spectacles up on his forehead and holding the letter very close to his eyes read as follows:

"My Dear,

"Mrs. Bulfinch is in need of a change and has decided to leave, and as I do not feel inclined to stay on here without her I am going too. I have had all the literature I can stand and I am fed up with art.

"Mrs. Bulfinch does not care about marriage, but if you care to divorce me she is willing to marry me. I hope you will find the new cook satisfactory. She has excellent references. It may save you trouble if I inform you that Mrs. Bulfinch and I are living at 411, Kennington Road, S. E.

"Albert."

No one spoke. Mr. Simmons slipped his spectacles back onto the bridge of his nose. The fact was that none of them, brilliant as they were and accustomed to find topics of conversation to suit every occasion, could think of an appropriate remark. Mrs. Albert Forrester was not the kind of woman to whom you could offer condolences, and each was too much afraid of the other's ridicule to venture upon the obvious. At last Clifford Boyleston came bravely to the rescue.

"One doesn't know what to say," he observed.

There was another silence and then Rose Waterford spoke.

"What does Mrs. Bulfinch look like?" she asked.

"How should I know?" answered Mrs. Albert Forrester, somewhat peevishly. "I have never looked at her. Albert always engaged the servants. She just came in for a moment so that I could see if her aura was satisfactory."

"But you must have seen her every morning when you did the housekeeping."

"Albert did the housekeeping. It was his own wish, so that I might be free to devote myself to my work. In this life one has to limit oneself."

"Did Albert order your luncheons?" asked Clifford Boyleston.

"Naturally. It was his province."

Clifford Boyleston slightly raised his eyebrows. What a fool he had been never to guess that it was Albert who was responsible for Mrs. Forrester's beautiful food! And of course it was owing to him that the excellent Chablis was always just sufficiently chilled to run coolly over the tongue, but never so cold as to lose its bouquet and its savor.

"He certainly knew good food and good wine."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I always told you he had his points," answered Mrs. Albert Forrester, as though he were reproaching her. "You all laughed at him. You would not believe me when I told you that I owed a great deal to him."

There was no answer to this and once more silence, heavy and ominous, fell on the party. Suddenly Mr. Simmons flung a bombshell.

"You must get him back."

So great was her surprise that if Mrs. Albert Forrester had not been standing against the chimney-piece she would undoubtedly have staggered two paces to the rear.

"What on earth do you mean?" she cried, "I will never see him again as long as I live. Take him back? Never. Not even if he came and begged me on his bended knees."

"I didn't say take him back; I said get him back."

But Mrs. Albert Forrester paid no attention to the misplaced interruption.

"I have done everything for him. What would he be without me? I ask you. I have given him a position which never in his remotest dreams could he have aspired to."

None could deny that there was something magnificent in the indignation of Mrs. Albert Forrester, but it appeared to have little effect on Mr. Simmons.

"What are you going to live on?"

Mrs. Albert Forrester flung him a glance totally devoid of amiability.

"God will provide," she answered in freezing tones.

"I think it very unlikely," he returned.

Mrs. Albert Forrester shrugged her shoulders. She wore an outraged expression. But Mr. Simmons made himself as comfortable as he could on his chair and lit a cigarette.

"You know you have no warmer admirer of your art than me," he said.

"Than I," corrected Clifford Boyleston.

"Or than you," went on Mr. Simmons blandly. "We all agree that there is no one writing now who you need fear comparison with. Both in prose and verse you are absolutely first class. And your style — well, everyone knows your style."

"The opulence of Sir Thomas Browne with the limpidity of Cardinal Newman," said Clifford Boyleston. "The raciness of John Dryden with the precision of Jonathan Swift."

The only sign that Mrs. Albert Forrester heard was the smile that hesitated for a brief moment at the corners of her tragic mouth.

"And you have humor."

"Is there anyone in the world," cried Miss Waterford, "who can put such a wealth of wit and satire and comic observation into a semicolon?"

"But the fact remains that you don't sell," pursued Mr. Simmons imperturbably. "I've handled your work for twenty years and I tell you frankly that I shouldn't have grown fat on my commission, but I've handled it because now and again I like to do what I can for good work.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I've always believed in you and I've hoped that sooner or later we might get the public to swallow you. But if you think you can make your living by writing the sort of stuff you do I'm bound to tell you that you haven't a chance."

"I have come into the world too late," said Mrs. Albert Forrester. "I should have lived in the Eighteenth Century when the wealthy patron rewarded a dedication with 100 guineas."

"What do you suppose the currant business brings in?"

Mrs. Albert Forrester gave a little sigh.

"A pittance. Albert always told me he made about 1200 a year."

"He must be a very good manager. But you couldn't expect him on that income to allow you very much. Take my word for it, there's only one thing for you to do and that's to get him back."

"I would rather live in a garret. Do you think I'm going to submit to the affront he has put upon me? Would you have me battle for his affections with my cook? Do not forget that there is one thing which is more valuable to a woman like me than her ease and that is her dignity."

"I was just coming to that," said Mr. Simmons coldly.

He glanced at the others and those strange, lopsided eyes of his looked more than ever monstrous and fish-like.

"There is no doubt in my mind," he went on, "that you have a very distinguished and almost unique position in the world of letters. You stand for something quite apart. You never prostituted your genius for filthy lucre and you have held high the banner of pure art. You're thinking of going into Parliament. I don't think much of politics myself, but there's no denying that it would be a good advertisement, and if you get in I daresay we could get you a lecture tour in America on the strength of it. You have ideals and this I can say, that even the people who've never read a word you've written respect you. But in your position there's one thing you can't afford to be and that's a joke."

Mrs. Albert Forrester gave a distinct start.

"What on earth do you mean by that?"

"I know nothing about Mrs. Bulfinch and for all I know she's a very respectable woman, but the fact remains that a man doesn't run away with his cook without making his wife ridiculous. If it had been a dancer or a lady of title I daresay it wouldn't have done you any harm, but a cook would finish you. In a week you'd have all London laughing at you, and if there's one thing that kills an author or a politician it is ridicule. You must get your husband back and you must get him back pretty damned quick."

A dark flush settled on Mrs. Albert Forrester's face, but she did not immediately reply. In her ears there rang on a sudden the outrageous and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

unaccountable laughter that had sent Miss Warren flying from the room.

"We're all friends here and you can count on our discretion."

Mrs. Forrester looked at her friends and she thought that in Rose Waterford's eyes there was already a malicious gleam. On the wizened face of Oscar Charles was a whimsical look. She wished that in a moment of abandon she had not betrayed her secret. Mr. Simmons, however, knew the literary world and allowed his eyes to rest on the company.

"After all, you are the centre and head of their set. Your husband has not only run away from you but also from them. It's not too good for them either. The fact is that Albert Forrester has made you all look a lot of damned fools."

"All," said Clifford Boyleston. "We're all in the same boat. He's quite right, Mrs. Forrester, The Philatelist must come back."

"*Et tu, Brute.*"

Mr. Simmons did not understand Latin and if he had would probably not have been moved by Mrs. Albert Forrester's exclamation.

"My suggestion is that Mrs. Albert Forrester should go and see him tomorrow — fortunately we have his address — and beg him to reconsider his decision. I don't know what sort of things a woman says on these occasions, but Mrs. Forrester has tact and imagination and she must say them. If Mr. Forrester makes any conditions she must accept them. She must leave no stone unturned."

"If you play your cards well there is no reason why you shouldn't bring him back here with you tomorrow evening," said Rose Waterford lightly.

"Will you do it, Mrs. Forrester?"

For two minutes, at least, turned away from them, she stared at the empty fireplace; then, drawing herself to her full height, she faced them.

"For my art's sake, not for mine. I will not allow the ribald laughter of the Philistine to besmirch all that I hold good and true and beautiful."

"Capital," said Mr. Simmons, rising to his feet, "I'll look in on my way home tomorrow and I hope to find you and Mr. Forrester billing and cooing side by side like a pair of turtledoves."

He took his leave, and the others, anxious not to be left alone with Mrs. Albert Forrester and her agitation, in a body followed his example.

It was latish in the afternoon next day when Mrs. Albert Forrester, imposing in black silk and a velvet toque, set out from her flat in order to get a bus from the Marble Arch that would take her to Victoria Station. Mr. Simmons had explained to her by telphone how to reach the Kennington Road with expedition and economy. She neither felt nor looked like Delilah. At Victoria she took the tram that runs down the Vauxhall Bridge Road. When she crossed the river she found herself in a part of London more noisy, sordid and bustling than that to which she was accustomed, but she was too

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

much occupied with her thoughts to notice the varied scene. She was relieved to find that the tram went along the Kennington Road, and asked the conductor to put her down a few doors from the house she sought. When it did and rumbled on, leaving her alone in the busy street, she felt strangely lost, like a traveller in an Eastern tale set down by a djinn in an unknown city. She walked slowly, looking to right and left, and notwithstanding the emotions of indignation and embarrassment that fought for the possession of her somewhat opulent bosom she could not but reflect that here was the material for a very pretty piece of prose. The little houses held about them the feeling of a bygone age when here it was still almost country, and Mrs. Albert Forrester registered in her retentive memory a note that she must look into the literary associations of the Kennington Road. Number 411 was one of a row of shabby houses that stood some way back from the street; in front of it was a narrow strip of shabby grass, and a paved way led up to a latticed wooden porch that badly needed a coat of paint. This and the straggling, stunted creeper that grew over the front of the house gave it a falsely rural air which was strange and even sinister in that road down which thundered a tumultuous traffic. There was something equivocal about the house that suggested that here lived women to whom a life of pleasure had brought an inadequate reward.

The door was opened by a scraggy girl of fifteen with long legs and a tousled head.

"Does Mrs. Bulfinch live here, do you know?"

"You've rung the wrong bell. Second floor." The girl pointed to the stairs and at the same time screamed shrilly: "Mrs. Bulfinch, a party to see you. Mrs. Bulfinch."

Mrs. Albert Forrester walked up the dingy stairs. They were covered with torn carpet. She walked slowly, for she did not wish to get out of breath. A door opened as she reached the second floor, and she recognized her cook.

"Good afternoon, Bulfinch," said Mrs. Albert Forrester, with dignity. "I wish to see your master."

Mrs. Bulfinch hesitated for the shadow of a second, then held the door wide open.

"Come in, ma'am." She turned her head. "Albert, here's Mrs. Forrester to see you."

Mrs. Forrester stepped by quickly and there was Albert sitting by the fire in a leather-covered but rather shabby armchair, with his feet in slippers, and in shirt sleeves. He was reading the evening paper and smoking a cigar. He rose to his feet as Mrs. Albert Forrester came in. Mrs. Bulfinch followed her visitor into the room and closed the door.

"How are you, my dear?" said Albert cheerfully. "Keeping well, I hope."

"You'd better put on your coat, Albert," said Mrs. Bulfinch. "What

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

will Mrs. Forrester think of you, finding you like that? I never."

She took the coat, which was hanging on a peg, and helped him into it; and, like a woman familiar with the peculiarities of masculine dress, pulled down his waistcoat so that it should not ride over his collar.

"I received your letter, Albert," said Mrs. Forrester.

"I supposed you had, or you wouldn't have known my address, would you?"

"Won't you sit down, ma'am?" said Mrs. Bulfinch, deftly dusting a chair, part of a suite covered in plum-colored velvet, and pushing it forwards.

Mrs. Albert Forrester with a slight bow seated herself.

"I should have preferred to see you alone, Albert," she said.

His eyes twinkled.

"Since anything you have to say concerns Mrs. Bulfinch as much as it concerns me I think it much better that she should be present."

"As you wish."

Mrs. Bulfinch drew up a chair and sat down. Mrs. Albert Forrester had never seen her before but with a large apron over a print dress. She was wearing now an open-work blouse of white silk, a black skirt, and high-heeled patent-leather shoes with silver buckles. She was a woman of about five-and-forty, with reddish hair and a reddish face, not pretty, but with a good-natured look, and buxom. She reminded Mrs. Albert Forrester of a serving-wench, somewhat overblown, in a jolly picture by an old Dutch master.

"Well, my dear, what have you to say to me?" asked Albert.

Mrs. Albert Forrester gave him her brightest and most affable smile. Her great black eyes shone with tolerant good humor.

"Of course you know that this is perfectly absurd, Albert. I think you must be out of your mind."

"Do you, my dear? Fancy that."

"I'm not angry with you, I'm only amused, but a joke's a joke and should not be carried too far. I've come to take you home."

"Was my letter not quite clear?"

"Perfectly. I ask no questions and I will make no reproaches. We will look upon this as a momentary aberration and say no more about it."

"Nothing will induce me ever to live with you again, my dear," said Albert in, however, a perfectly friendly fashion.

"You're not serious?"

"Quite."

"Do you love this woman?"

Mrs. Albert Forrester still smiled with an eager and somewhat metallic brightness. She was determined to take the matter lightly. With her intimate sense of values she realized that the scene was comic. Albert looked at Mrs. Bulfinch and a smile broke out on his withered face.

"We get on very well together, don't we, old girl?"

"Not so bad," said Mrs. Bulfinch.

Mrs. Albert Forrester raised her eyebrows; her husband had never

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in all their married life called *her* "old girl": nor indeed would she have wished it.

"If Bulfinch has any regard or respect for you she must know that the thing is impossible. After the life you've led and the society you've moved in she can hardly expect to make you permanently happy in miserable furnished lodging."

"They're not furnished lodgin's, ma'am," said Mrs. Bulfinch. "It's all me own furniture. You see, I'm very independent like and I've always liked to have a home of me own. So I keep these rooms on whether I'm in a situation or whether I'm not, and so I always have some place."

"And a very nice cozy little place it is," said Albert.

Mrs. Albert Forrester looked about her. There was a kitchen range in the fireplace on which a kettle was simmering, and on the mantelshelf was a black marble clock flanked by black marble candelabra. There was a large table covered with a red cloth, a dresser, and a sewing-machine. On the walls were photographs and framed pictures from Christmas supplements. A door at the back, covered with a red plush portière, led into what, considering the size of the house, Mrs. Albert Forrester (who in her leisure moments had made a somewhat extensive study of architecture) could not but conclude was the only bedroom. Mrs. Bulfinch and Albert lived in a contiguity that allowed no doubt about their relations.

"Have you not been happy with me, Albert?" asked Mrs. Forrester in a deeper tone.

"We've been married for 35 years, my dear. It's too long. It's a great deal too long. You're a good woman in your way, but you don't suit me. You're literary and I'm not. You're artistic and I'm not."

"I've always taken care to make you share in all my interests. I've taken great pains that you shouldn't be overshadowed by my success. You can't say that I've ever left you out of things."

"You're a wonderful writer, I don't deny it for a moment, but the truth is I don't like the books you write."

"That, if I may be permitted to say so, merely shows that you have very bad taste. All the best critics admit their power and their charm."

"And I don't like your friends. Let me tell you a secret, my dear. Often at your parties I've had an almost irresistible impulse to take off all my clothes just to see what would happen."

"Nothing would have happened," said Mrs. Albert Forrester with a slight frown. "I should merely have sent for the doctor."

"Besides, you haven't the figure for that, Albert," said Mrs. Bulfinch.

Mr. Simmons had hinted to Mrs. Albert Forrester that if the need arose she must not hesitate to use the allurements of her sex in order to bring back her erring husband to the conjugal roof, but she did not in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

least know how to do this. It would have been easier, she could not but reflect, had she been in evening dress.

"Does the fidelity of five-and-thirty years count for nothing? I have never looked at another man, Albert. I'm used to you. I shall be lost without you."

"I've left all my menus with the new cook, ma'am. You've only got to tell her how many to luncheon and she'll manage," said Mrs. Bulfinch. "She's very reliable and she has as light a hand with pastry as anyone I ever knew."

Mrs. Albert Forrester began to be discouraged. Mrs. Bulfinch's remark, well-meant no doubt, made it difficult to bring the conversation onto the plane on which emotion could be natural.

"I'm afraid you're only wasting your time, my dear," said Albert. "My decision is irrevocable. I'm not very young any more and I want someone to take care of me. I shall of course make you as good an allowance as I can. Corinne wants me to retire."

"Who is Corinne?" asked Mrs. Forrester with the utmost surprise.

"It's my name," said Mrs. Bulfinch. "My mother was half French."

"That explains a great deal," replied Mrs. Forrester, pursing her lips, for though she admired the literature of the French she knew that their morals left much to be desired.

"What I say is, Albert's worked long enough, and it's about time he started enjoying himself. I've got a little bit of property at Clacton-on-Sea. It's a very healthy neighborhood and the air is wonderful. We could live there very comfortable. And what with the beach and the pier there's always something to do. They're a very nice lot of people down there. If you don't interfere with nobody, nobody'll interfere with you."

"I discussed the matter with my partners today and they're willing to buy me out. It means a certain sacrifice. When everything is settled I shall have an income of £900 a year. There are three of us, so it gives us just 300 a year apiece."

"How am I to live on that?" cried Mrs. Albert Forrester. "I have my position to keep up."

"You have a fluent, a fertile and a distinguished pen, my dear."

Mrs. Albert Forrester impatiently shrugged her shoulders.

"You know very well that my books don't bring me in anything but reputation. The publishers always say that they lose by them and in fact they only publish them because it gives them prestige."

It was then that Mrs. Bulfinch had the idea that was to have consequences of such magnitude.

"Why don't you write a good thrilling detective story?" she asked.

"Me?" exclaimed Mrs. Albert Forrester, for the first time in her life regardless of grammar.

"It's not a bad idea," said Albert. "It's not a bad idea at all."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I should have the critics down on me like a thousand of bricks."

"I'm not so sure of that. Give the highbrow the chance of being lowbrow without demeaning himself and he'll be so grateful to you, he won't know what to do."

"For this relief much thanks," murmured Mrs. Albert Forrester reflectively.

"My dear, the critics'll eat it. And written in your beautiful English they won't be afraid to call it a masterpiece."

"The idea is preposterous. It's absolutely foreign to my genius. I could never hope to please the masses."

"Why not? The masses want to read good stuff, but they dislike being bored. They all know your name, but they don't read you, because you bore them. The fact is, my dear, you're dull."

"I don't know how you can say that, Albert," replied Mrs. Albert Forrester, with as little resentment as the equator might feel if someone called it chilly. "Everyone knows and acknowledges that I have an exquisite sense of humor and there is nobody who can extract so much good wholesome fun from a semicolon as I can."

"If you can give the masses a good thrilling story and let them think at the same time that they are improving their minds you'll make a fortune."

"I've never read a detective story in my life," said Mrs. Albert Forrester. "I once heard of a Mr. Barnes of New York and I was told that he had written a book called *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*. But I never read it."

"Of course you have to have the knack," said Mrs. Bulfinch. "The first thing to remember is that you don't want any lovemaking — it's out of place in a detective story; what you want is murder, and sleuth-hounds, and you don't want to be able to guess who done it till the last page."

"But you must play fair with your reader, my dear," said Albert. "It always annoys me when suspicion has been thrown on the secretary or the lady of title and it turns out to be the second footman who's never done more than say, 'The carriage is at the door.' Puzzle your reader as much as you can, but don't make a fool of him."

"I love a good detective story," said Mrs. Bulfinch. "Give me a lady in evening dress, just streaming with diamonds, lying on the library floor with a dagger in her heart and I know I'm going to have a treat."

"There's no accounting for tastes," said Albert. 'Personally, I prefer a respectable family solicitor, with side-whiskers, gold watch chain, and a benign appearance, lying dead in Hyde Park."

"With his throat cut?" asked Mrs. Bulfinch eagerly.

"No, stabbed in the back. There's something peculiarly attractive to the reader in the murder of a middle-aged gentleman of spotless reputation. It is pleasant to think that the most

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

apparently blameless of us have a mystery in our lives."

"I see what you mean, Albert," said Mrs. Bulfinch. "He was the repository of a fatal secret."

"We can give you all the tips, my dear," said Albert, smiling mildly at Mrs. Albert Forrester. "I've read hundreds of detective stories."

"You!"

"That's what first brought Corinne and me together. I used to pass them on to her when I'd finished them."

"Many's the time I've heard him switch off the electric light as the dawn was creeping through the window and I couldn't help smiling to myself as I said: 'There, he's finished it at last, now he can sleep.' "

Mrs. Albert Forrester rose to her feet. She drew herself up.

"Now I see what a gulf separates us," she said, and her fine contralto shook a little. "You have been surrounded for 30 years with all that was best in English literature and you read hundreds of detective novels."

"Hundreds and hundreds," interrupted Albert with a smile of satisfaction.

"I came here willing to make any reasonable concession so that you should come back to your home, but now I wish it no longer. You have shown me that we have nothing in common and never had. There is an abyss between us."

"Very well, my dear," said Albert gently, "I will submit to your decision. But you think over the detective story."

"I will arise and go now," she murmured, "and go to Innisfree."

"I'll just show you downstairs," said Mrs. Bulfinch. "One has to be careful of the carpet if one doesn't exactly know where the holes are."

With dignity, but not without circumspection, Mrs. Albert Forrester walked downstairs, and when Mrs. Bulfinch opened the door and asked her if she would like a taxi she shook her head.

"I shall take the tram."

"You need not be afraid that I won't take good care of Mr. Forrester, ma'am," said Mrs. Bulfinch pleasantly. "He shall have every comfort. I nursed Mr. Bulfinch for three years during his last illness and there's very little I don't know about invalids. Not that Mr. Forrester isn't very strong and active for his years. And of course he'll have a hobby. I always think a man should have a hobby. He's going to collect postage stamps."

Mrs. Albert Forrester gave a little start of surprise. But just then a tram came in sight and, as a woman (even the greatest of them) will, she hurried at the risk of her life into the middle of the road and waved frantically. It stopped and she climbed in. She did not know how she was going to face Mr. Simmons. He would be waiting for her when she got home. Clifford Boyleston would probably be there too. They would all be there and she would have to tell them that she had miserably failed. At that moment she had no warm feeling of friendship towards her little group

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of devoted admirers. Wondering what the time was, she looked up at the man sitting opposite her to see whether he was the kind of person she could modestly ask, and suddenly started; for sitting there was a middle-aged gentleman of the most respectable appearance, with side-whiskers, a benign expression and a gold watch chain. It was the very man whom Albert had described lying dead in Hyde Park, and she could not but jump to the conclusion that he was a family solicitor. The coincidence was extraordinary and really it looked as though the hand of fate were beckoning to her. He wore a silk hat, a black coat and pepper-and-salt trousers, he was somewhat corpulent, of a powerful build, and by his side was a despatch-case. When the tram was halfway down the Vauxhall Bridge Road he asked the conductor to stop and she saw him go down a small, mean street. Why? Ah, why? When it reached Victoria, so deeply immersed in thought was she, until the conductor somewhat roughly told her where she was, she did not move. Edgar Allan Poe had written detective stories. She took a bus. She sat inside, buried in reflection, but when it arrived at Hyde Park Corner she suddenly made up her mind to get out. She couldn't sit still any longer. She felt she must walk. She entered the gates, walking slowly, and looked about her with an air that was at once intent and abstracted. Yes, there was Edgar Allan Poe; no one could deny that. After all, he had invented the genre, and everyone knew how great his influence had been on the Parnassians. Or was it the Symbolists? Never mind. Baudelaire and all that. As she passed the Achilles Statue she stopped for a minute and looked at it with raised eyebrows.

At length she reached her flat and, opening the door, saw several hats in the hall. They were all there. She went into the drawing-room.

"Here she is at last," cried Miss Waterford.

Mrs. Albert Forrester advanced, smiling with animation, and shook the proffered hands. Mr. Simmons and Clifford Boyleston were there, Harry Oakland and Oscar Charles.

"Oh, you poor things, have you had no tea?" she cried brightly. "I haven't an idea what the time is, but I know I'm fearfully late."

"Well?" they said. "Well?"

"My dears, I've got something quite wonderful to tell you. I've had an inspiration. Why should the devil have all the best tunes?"

"What *do* you mean?"

She paused in order to give full effect to the surprise she was going to spring upon them. Then she flung it at them without preamble:

"*I'M GOING TO WRITE A DETECTIVE STORY!*"

They stared at her with open mouths. She held up her hand to prevent them from interrupting her, but indeed no one had the smallest intention of doing so.

"I am going to raise the detective story to the dignity of Art. It came

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to me suddenly in Hyde Park. It's a murder story and I shall give the solution on the very last page. I shall write it in an impeccable English, and since it's occurred to me lately that perhaps I've exhausted the possibilities of the semicolon, I am going to take up the colon. No one yet has explored its potentialities. Humor and mystery are what I aim at. I shall call it *The Achilles Statue.*"

"What a title!" cried Mr. Simmons, recovering himself before any of the others. "I can sell the serial rights on the title and your name alone."

"But what about Albert?" asked Clifford Boyleston.

"Albert?" echoed Mrs. Forrester. "Albert?"

She looked at him as though for the life of her she could not think what he was talking about. Then she gave a little cry as if she had suddenly remembered.

"Albert! I knew I'd gone out on some errand and it absolutely slipped my memory. I was walking through Hyde Park and I had this inspiration. What a fool you'll all think me!"

"Then you haven't seen Albert?"

"My dear, I forgot all about him." She gave an amused laugh. "Let Albert keep his cook. I can't bother about Albert now. Albert belongs to the semicolon period. I am going to write a detective story."

"My dear, you're too, too wonderful," said Harry Oakland.

NEXT MONTH . . .

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE will bring you —

Margery Allingham's ON CHRISTMAS DAY IN THE MORNING

Baynard Kendrick's 5 — 4 = MURDERER

Francis Iles's THE COWARD

Ray Bradbury's THE FRUIT AT THE BOTTOM OF THE BOWL

Wilbur Daniel Steele's THE MANHUNTER

James Yaffe's MOM MAKES A BET

Louis Bromfield's CRIME PASSIONNEL

Peter B. Kyne's NEW YEAR'S EVE IN PANAMINT

and five other fine tales of detection and crime

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

You will recall that Thomas Flanagan's first story about Major Tennente, "The Cold Winds of Adesta," won the $2000 First Prize in EQMM's Seventh Annual Contest. Here is the next story in the Major Tennente saga, the second story about a professional soldier who is also a professional policeman.

Major Tennente is the thinking man of today who finds himself pushed into an ambiguous, if not untenable, position. As a professional soldier, he wants more than anything else to live by the code of honor; but it is the dilemma of his time that Tennente lives in a world where honor no longer seems to have any meaning. As a military policeman, Tennente is in the service of his country — that is to say, in the service of its ruler, the General. Tennente has no choice but to carry out the letter of the law, as his General has laid down the law; but the spirit of the law is another matter. As Tennente says in this second story: "Often it is not easy to do my duty. Often the things I do trouble me. But I must do them, you understand. There are things which have to be done."

That is the dilemma of our time: for the thinking man of today, especially the soldier-policeman-statesman, finds himself "caught upon the high point of honor, where one must choose right or be damned forever." Or, as the author put it in a letter to your Editors, "Major Tennente is his own spokesman: he is not quite respectable, perhaps, but he is a man with great moral sense who is trying to come to terms with the particular world in which he lives."

Aren't we all?

THE POINT OF HONOR

by THOMAS FLANAGAN

THE SERGEANT LED THE AMERICAN doctor into the investigation room and closed the door. The room, like the rest of the Building of Civil Affairs, was decorated in that kind of "modern" which is obsolete within a year of its design. There were two large, blonde-oak desks at the far end of the room, and between them a window which looked out upon the darkened Plaza. The doctor saw an examining chair in one corner of the room, and facing it were several small but, he guessed, powerful arc lights. There was a colored photograph of the General on the opposite wall, his thick torso bulging the white uniform-tunic, his face bland

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and comatose, as though enduring the adoration of thousands.

The sergeant showed Dr. Corton to a chair next to one of the desks, and Corton sank into it. He had imagined that the sergeant's questioning had ended his share in the business, but now he discovered that this questioning had merely been preliminary. "The Major will want to examine you here," the sergeant said. The sergeant was good-natured enough, with his young plump face and awkward gestures.

"What major?" Corton asked. He was tired and his voice showed irritation.

"Major Tennente."

"Is he in charge of the police?"

"He was once, but he was demoted after the General came into power. He did not belong to the Party." The sergeant flicked, a trifle pompously, the medallion in his uniform lapel. "And in many ways he is disagreeable. But he has much intelligence."

Corton dug into the pocket of his rumpled cord-jacket, pulled out a pack of American cigarettes, and extended it to the sergeant, who shook his head. "You don't like the cigarettes made here, Doctor? They are very good."

The doctor turned his head away, lit his cigarette, and looked out into the dark Plaza. Since he had first come to live in this small Mediterranean country, he had often felt as he was feeling now, half-angry, half-frightened. Periodically, a searchlight would play across the Plaza, outlining the white buildings, on whose roofs soldiers, armed with submachine guns, slouched on half-relaxed guard. Corton sat watching the sudden burst of light, the illumination, the darkness, until he heard the door open. He twisted around.

Major Tennente limped across the room to the doctor, thrusting his long, thin right leg stiffly in front of him. He was a tall man, his tunic half-buttoned, his face unshaven. The face was sallow and sunken-cheeked, the dark brown eyes shaded by sleep-drugged lids. He dropped slowly into the chair, and then carefully stretched the bad leg outside the desk, so that it rested near Corton.

"I am Major Tennente, Doctor," he said. "I want to ask you questions about what happened."

Corton nodded.

"We are both tired, Doctor, but we both have professions which should have inured us to fatigue. I will try to make my questions direct ones, and I will not waste your time. When the servants called you to Bremann's house, he was dead. Is that correct?"

"He had just died. He must have died shortly before I arrived."

"And why did the servants, if you will pardon my impoliteness, happen to call you? It is not usual to call on foreigners in such circumstances."

Corton shifted impatiently in his chair. "I have explained all this to the sergeant. It is all in my statement."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes," Tennente said. "I have read it. Why did they happen to call you?"

"Bremann was my patient," Corton said, in a deliberately mechanical voice. "He had been since he came here five years ago."

"What sort of patient?"

"A diabetic. A severe case. He needed my attention frequently, and he required large shots of insulin daily."

"Did you give him the injections yourself?"

"Not ordinarily. Usually he would administer them himself. But I have done so on occasion."

"Insulin is injected subcutaneously — usually in the arm, is it not?"

"When the injection is given by another person, yes."

"Did you notice anything peculiar about his arm, the right one?"

"If you mean did I notice the serial number tattooed there, yes. Bremann had spent five years in a German concentration camp. He would have died there if the American army had not liberated the camp. They gave their prisoners tattooed numbers that way — on the arm."

"There were a good many prisoners. I suppose they had to keep check on them all. Yes. Things were bad in some of the camps. Perhaps he contracted his disease there."

"No," Corton said. "He had been sick a long time. But the prison camp did not help." He crushed out his cigarette. "Is that all? It is late."

"Not quite, Doctor. Almost. A man named Bremann — a man who had been number 64432 — dies by gunshot. A Luger of the former German army. His killer is seized by servants. They phone you. They phone the police. The police find a rifled safe and a dead man. They also take a prisoner into custody." The dark-lidded eyes looked into Corton's. "Did you know this Bremann well? Other than as a doctor would know him? Do you know of his past at all?"

"I would not ask personal questions of a man who had been five years in a death camp. I would not help him to remember that. It was something which shocked me. We do not have concentration camps where I come from. I understand it is different here."

The sleepy lids drew back from Major Tennente's eyes. They were not the soft brown of the country people here, Corton saw. "We have camps of detention, yes. The conditions here are unsettled. There has been a revolution."

"Before your revolution, conditions were unsettled — but there were no camps."

"Exactly. And the General does not want the conditions of his own rise to power repeated." The brown eyes looked up briefly at the garishly colored photograph.

"Before the revolution, when a resident was murdered and his killer seized, it was a simple matter for the police."

Tennente rubbed his hands across

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his face, pulling at the cheeks. When he took his hands away, the hawk's eyes were again hooded. "This is not a simple matter, Doctor. Far from it." He smiled slightly, drawing back his lips across stained, uneven teeth. "The prisoner is not a simple killer."

"You know of him then? He was wanted by the police?"

There was a pause before the major answered. "Not only by the police. Whole armies were looking for him. All Europe was looking for him."

For the first time, Corton felt his hostile apathy leaving him. "What man?"

"Did you ever hear of a von Hertig? A Colonel von Hertig?"

Corton shook his head.

"Ah. I am afraid that in this country news does not travel as freely as in some others. You have heard of Skorzeny? Von-Hertig commanded a special detachment of the S.S. — one with special duties. During the Rundstedt breakthrough, his detachment infiltrated the Allied lines in American uniforms. There was an unpleasantness about his treatment of Allied prisoners. In the final days of the war, his detachment was assigned as an extermination command with orders to clean up the more notorious camps."

"Yes," Corton said, and his mind was forced back toward things he had tried to forget. "Yes, I remember now. I was in Germany then, with the American armies. My regiment found the 'unpleasantness' to which you refer — a mound of corpses. When the camp at Mulburg was opened, there were only 300 survivors. Well," he said, fighting back the remembered nausea, "there is a feather in your cap. You can identify him?"

"Yes. I have examined him several times. He carried sufficient identification." Tennente smiled. "Quite sufficient."

"Well," Corton said quietly, "I congratulate you. Perhaps now you will arrange transportation for me."

"I am sorry that there is this difficulty, Doctor, but it is best that you should know it now. The General has taken a special interest in this case, because an important man is involved. It will be necessary, because of certain of the General's instructions, to keep you in protective custody."

Corton looked at him impassively, and then said, his voice almost breaking with suppressed anger, "May I use the phone? I wish to phone the American representative here."

"There will be no need, Doctor. He could do nothing for you for twenty-four hours, and by that time you will have been released."

"I presume," Corton said, "that the important man involved is this von Hertig?"

Tennente again gave Corton his unpleasant smile. "Of course. Not Bremann, surely? A fat little refugee. Of course, von Hertig." He placed his hand on his leg, and nursing it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gently, drew himself erect. "I would like you to come with me."

"You don't need me."

"Perhaps. But come with me."

Corton got up angrily. The sergeant jumped to the door and opened it, and they walked down the corridor, death-white, reflecting the indirect fluorescent lighting. Tennente walked slowly and clumsily, and Corton, prompted to an unusual malice, walked ahead of him impatiently.

"You will excuse me, Doctor. A long time ago I got this wooden thing for a leg. In a battle a long time ago."

Corton said nothing, and they entered the elevator in silence. "Tell me," Tennente said, "you yourself came here shortly after the war, did you not?"

"Yes," Corton said abruptly. "I was sick of killing and wanted to do some healing. There is a lot of it to be done in this counrty."

"Is there not?" the major agreed.

They emerged on a badly lighted floor whose paint was old and peeling. "It is not pretty here," Tennente said. "No. We have prisoners here. Not nice make-believe prisoners like you." He motioned to the sergeant, who opened a door.

They entered a room littered with old desks, tables, empty ammunition boxes, and there, stretched out uncovered and naked on a table, was Bremann's body. Corton looked viciously at Tennente, and then averted his eyes from the body. He had seen bodies in many places. They never looked good; they looked very bad on the slabs of a morgue. But there was something so wanton, so random about this that it sickened him. Tennente walked to the body, the small, pudgy innocuous body, now stripped of its last defenses. "Come here, Doctor," he said, and Corton, impelled, turned. "Can you identify him?"

Corton looked at the plump face, the marks about the nose where rimless spectacles had once rested, the cruelly stamped right arm.

"That was Bremann," he said.

Tennente walked to a desk, sat on its edge, and nodded to the sergeant, who left the room. Tennente reached in his tunic pocket and drew out a thin, crooked cigar. He bit off the end, spat it on the floor, and then lit the cigar. Corton walked to the other side of the small room and stood still.

Presently, the sergeant re-opened the door, and two guards led the prisoner in. He walked, like the major, with a limp, but a slight one, and he held his tall, heavy body rigid. Despite the weather, he wore a black military trench-coat, and his hands were buried in its pockets. He shook his arms free of the guards, walked straight into the room a few paces, half-turned, and faced Tennente. His face was square and hard, the lips thin and cruel. It was the kind of face Corton had seen on primitive Mexican statuary. "Well," he asked, his voice hard, and with the traces of what once had been the accent and tone of command.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tennente slipped off the desk and stood facing him, the cigar burning easily between his fingers. He pointed with the cigar to the table. "I thought you might like to see him again."

Von Hertig, as though for the first time aware of the body, walked to it, and stood looking down at it. Corton watched the corners of the cruel mouth pull into the most remote of smiles. "Pig," he said, and turned away.

Corton pulled himself away from the wall, and Tennente again unhooded his eyes, catching the doctor's, and they stood looking at each other. Von Hertig wheeled around, and with his curiously abrupt steps, strode to the major. "Well," he said. "What do you want of me?"

"Murder is a bad offense in this country," Tennente said mildly.

"When guilt has been established."

The smile broadened across Tennente's discolored teeth. "The General will be pleased in any case to turn von Hertig over to the Allied authorities."

"When he has been found."

Tennente's brown eyes widened. "Has he not?"

The prisoner walked up the room, wheeled, turned back. "Listen, to me, Major. A man is found with a — what word should I use — a wanted man's papers. That is bad for him, I grant. But this wanted man is a dangerous one — one with friends more powerful than those of a major of police, who happens not to belong to the Party in power in his nation. If I were such a major, I would assume a mistake."

Tennente drew on his cigar. "I have considered that. It could be done. But it is not my decision. It is the decision of the General. He has taken an interest in your case. He wishes to see you."

Von Hertig bowed. "I will see him."

Corton walked toward them then. "Major Tennente. This is a case which also happens to concern my government. This man is wanted by my government. He is a killer. He has killed Americans."

"This man?" Tennente asked. "Perhaps. If it could be proved."

"It can," Corton said. "Easily. This is one of the most wanted men in the world. His photograph must be in every police archive in the world."

Tennente sighed. "Would that not be simple? That is how, some day, others will be re-arrested. But the Colonel was clever as well as brave. There are no photographs. Only a few contradictory descriptions. Perhaps you have another method," he said ironically.

Von Hertig shrugged. "It is quite simple," he said. "There can be no way of fixing identity." With the gesture of a man flaunting his invulnerability, he drew from his pocket a slim, battered cigarette case, across which, slashed in the gold, was the jagged double-lightning of the *Shutz Staffel*.

Corton, in baffled anger, watched

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him place the cigarette in his mouth, and then the floating wisp of a memory, of a half-remembered legend, drifted across his mind. It escaped him for a moment, and then he caught it. "Yes," he said violently. "The jagged *S*." He saw with satisfaction the slightest trembling of the blunt, square-tipped fingers, but the face, outlined by the flaring match, was like stone.

"I don't understand you," Tennente said quietly.

"Perhaps you will. I am remembering the stories they told of this man. I am remembering that he and his detachment carried the double *S*, slashed on the arm, above the wrist."

Tennente dropped his cigar on the floor, and ground it out carefully. His eyes, when he looked up, were troubled.

"That is so, Major," von Hertig said. "Members of the *Shutz Staffel* were so marked." He placed his cigarette in his lips, unbuttoned his trench-coat, and dropped it to the floor. Beneath it he wore a white polo-shirt, short-sleeved. He extended both arms to them. "And I am not marked." The arms were sunburned and matted with hair, but they were not marked. Tennente relaxed slightly, and nodded to Corton.

"Do you mind, Major?" Corton asked. With a slight repugnance, he took the tips of von Hertig's fingers, and holding them, examined his arms. He stopped suddenly, and said, "Look, Major Tennente." Tennente bent down. "There has been a skin graft here. It was done some time ago, but it is still visible." He spoke to von Hertig for the first time. "Surely it could not have been shame, von Hertig? Was it because Patton's men were looking for German soldiers who carried an *SS* on the arm?"

"Doctor," Tennente said. "Do not make things difficult for us. You are too well-liked in this country. The skin graft proves very little."

"Added to other little things, it proves a lot," Corton said. "It proves a lot for me. It will prove enough for the American representative."

Tennente looked at him slowly, sorrowfully. "You understand this country very little even though you have lived in it, Doctor. I am very sorry for you. It would have been so easy." He sighed. "We will go now. You will come with us, Doctor Corton. The General wishes to see you also."

The doctor bowed in heavy sarcasm, and said gutturally, "I will see him." They walked to the door, Tennente smiling sadly, at no one, at nothing. He said to the guards, "You will take the prisoner by armed lorry. The sergeant will drive Doctor Corton and myself."

As they walked out, von Hertig looked again at the body, said "pig," and spat. He crushed out his cigarette. With his thumb, he slit open the cigarette absently, scattered the tobacco, and rolled the paper in a minute ball which he flicked away

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with his finger. Corton knew the gesture. Every old soldier did.

In the car, Corton rode with his head turned away from Tennente, looking out into the dark, armed city. Behind the closed, soundproofed windows, the sergeant drove carefully, stopping the car several times so that it might be identified by the patrols. The city, for all its armed men, had the desolate, barren look with which Corton had become familiar, long before he had seen the city, through certain paintings. The buildings seemed structures in which no one had ever lived, or ever would live. It was a white cemetery.

At last Tennente spoke. "I have been a soldier and a policeman a long time, Doctor. Often it is not easy to do my duty. Often the things I do trouble me."

Corton said nothing.

"But I must do them, you understand. There are things which have to be done. Life is not a pleasant thing. I need not remind a doctor of that."

Corton, still looking out the window, said, "Stop comparing our professions. They are not to be compared. A doctor with a soldier, perhaps. But not with a wolf."

"You are troubled because I am making it possible for von Hertig to claim not to be von Hertig, while you are sure he is. Well, I too am sure he is — but you cannot prove it. It will depend upon what the General says. I do not say that *I* could not prove it. It should not disturb you so. A refugee has been killed. An unimportant refugee — flotsam. And on the other side of the scale —" Tennente paused, then began again. "It is strange, is it not? The old army is gone, scattered. Some of the great ones are in jail. Some have been executed by you allies. Some are helping to build an army secretly in — a certain country. Most are dead upon many fields. A few — like von Hertig — flitting shadows across Europe and South America. Strange, enigmatic men, once important, perhaps one day important again."

The car swerved sharply. It had left the city behind now, and was headed out into the suburbs. "This is my nation," Tennente said. "Do you not see? And I must do for my nation what I can. And I am only one kind of thing. I am a policeman. Sometimes I do now what I did before the revolution. I catch murderers and thieves, and keep order. Sometimes now I do other things." He stopped and then resumed. "And this nation is in a difficult position. The General must be very careful. He must weigh everything. Von Hertig has powerful friends. The General must decide which is more advantageous — to turn a war criminal over to your government or to allow a Colonel to return to his old friends."

The General's residence in the suburbs could have been predicted from his photograph. Empty, ex-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pensive, without taste, where the frightened servants moved without noise. They waited for the General in an anteroom so bare it might have been in a public building.

At last the double doors swung open, and the General came to them, the man who lived for thousands, the faceless man who had no existence apart from the photographs, from the yelling crowds, from the machine guns, the empty buildings. He was dressed in a quilted dressing-gown, and the face above the gown was puffy with sleep.

Tennente saluted. "This is the prisoner, General."

The General nodded. He walked past the awed, reverent young guards to von Hertig. "You have placed yourself in great difficulty in this country." The General plunged his fists into the pockets of his gown. "You may very well have placed this nation in great difficulty."

"I need not have, General," von Hertig said, almost casually. "Your major of police is a tactless man. The thing could have been done and ended with no fuss."

The General turned to Tennente, and his small round eyes swept the gaunt body. "Yes, I have noticed that."

Tennente drew his left leg sharply against his wooden one. "It had occurred to me, General, that it would perhaps be expedient for this nation to turn Colonel von Hertig over to the American authorities."

"And so it would, Major, if we had him." He gave to Tennente one of his soft, dangerous public smiles. "Are you satisfied that we have?"

"That is for you to say, my General. Perhaps unfortunately, this doctor here, this American, has been of necessity a party to the affair. He is satisfied."

The smile drew back from the General's face. He looked savagely at Tennente for a moment, then turned to Corton, and this time his smile was the one he used when accepting bouquets of flowers from children. "Doctor Corton, of course. You are a resident of good standing here. We know your work at the clinic."

"I am only a resident here, General," Corton said. "I am a citizen of the United States."

"Yes, of course. This is a bad business, Doctor Corton. We do not wish to act unjustly." He looked back at von Hertig, who was standing aloof and arrogant, hardly listening to him. "But it is not an insoluble one. I believe that according to international usage a direct charge of murder takes precedence over proceedings for extradition. And that is what we have here. Yes." He smiled suddenly, because he was amused, and not because he thought a smile proper. "Your government will not mind who kills von Hertig, as long as he is executed."

Corton saw the trap and walked around it. "The idea of justice is not quite so simple in the United States. But at any rate, I am a doctor, not a diplomat. I imagine that when

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you report this incident to our American legation —"

"Yes," the General said sharply. He turned to Tennente. "You are to be congratulated on the handling of this affair, Major."

"Thank you, sir," Tennente said, refusing the irony. "Do you have any change in your instructions?"

"No!" the General almost screamed at him. "None at all! You will carry them out to the letter." He turned to von Hertig. "Sometime, I think, we will meet more pleasantly. If we could only sit down and talk, I am sure there are so many things we could discuss to our mutual profit."

Von Hertig bowed. "I will look forward to it."

"Just a moment," Corton said. "This wolf of yours, this Tennente, can establish this man's identity. It is something that will be looked into when my government hears of this."

"Yes," the General said. "When it hears of it. Major, the efficiency with which you handle the rest of this affair will do much for you. Good night to you, gentlemen." He turned to them, after another nod to von Hertig, and left the room.

In the car, moving through the dark country, Corton said, "It will be dawn soon. Drive me to the clinic, not to my house. I can sleep there for a while." He was not tired now, though; he was not even angry. He could see, through the dark window, Bremann's beaten, humble face. It seemed to him now that even the word, justice, stood for a quality, an activity of man, which had never existed.

"Yes, Doctor," Tennente said. "Very soon. First I must ask you to come with me to the airport."

Corton, half-guessing, turned to him sharply. "Why?"

Tennente hesitated, and then said, "Colonel von Hertig was traveling to another country. He carried a visa made out in another name. The General has instructed me to see that he uses it. A plane is leaving the airport at dawn."

Corton looked at the sunken cheeks, the hooded eyes. Tennente shrugged uncomfortably. "Well, what would you have? You saw yourself. I made it as difficult for the General as I could. But when he decided — I am a soldier. I have always been one."

Corton closed his eyes. He no longer hated Tennente, who was a good man according to his own lights, but who loved something more than justice. He loved something chill and frightening which the doctor could not define . . .

There was a café at the airport. Through its huge, plate-glass window the spotlights and working-lights could be seen playing on the sleek but heavy lines of a plane. Corton and the Major sat at a table by the window. Corton sat stiffly, his hands pressed hard on the table, but Tennente, almost exhausted, sat sprawled on the tiny wicker chair, sipping black coffee. The prisoner and his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

guards were closeted in the office of the airport, away from the curious.

Corton said, "That a man could have survived the death camps only to have one of their hunters track him down. . . . That is what is so ugly to me, and not that the killer should leave untouched."

Tennente smiled. "Doesn't that seem to you peculiar, Doctor? Not at all? You and the General, you are men who can permit yourselves the luxury of emotions. I cannot. And it seems to me very strange that a wanted man, a colonel, should risk death to hunt down a former prisoner. I ask myself, why did he do it?"

"I have no idea," Corton said.

"But those are the kind of questions which a policeman — a wolf — must ask himself. And he must say to himself: 'Was the prison camp as cruel to Bremann as the good doctor thinks?' "

Corton looked at him with contempt.

"No, I mean it," Tennente said. He pushed his coffee aside, and leaned toward the doctor. "This man, this Bremann, was a severe diabetic. He needed large shots of insulin daily. And his condition was severe *before* he entered the camp. You said so yourself, and he has been your patient these five years. That is to say, Bremann needed daily shots of a drug which in wartime was very scarce and very much needed. But every day, these monsters, as you call them, gave him his shot. Oh, he was very well treated, and why?"

Corton sat staring at the major. "Well, why?"

Tennente gazed out the window. The first light of the day was falling on the plane now, and the mountains, beyond which lay the Mediterranean, were caught in early light. "You are a good man, Doctor, but a simple one, as I had hoped. It will be a while before the plane takes off, and let us pretend that we are travelers here, bored and talkative. And let me tell you a story to pass the time. A story, mind, not true."

"Go on," Corton said.

"As I said, you are a good man, but simple. And do you know why? Because you don't live in a wolf's world. You live in a world where a soft man says to you 'refugee' and you say yes, and where a hard, handsome man says to you 'killer' and you say yes. The General also lives in such a world, but he is not a good man. Now, this is my fairy tale. Once there was a killer, an evil man named von Hertig. Even among the Nazis, he was singled out for his cruelties. He had killed prisoners. He had exterminated thousands of men and women. And when the war ended, he was frightened. Your soldiers were hunting down the *SS*. The evil men were in a dangerous situation, because many of them had been tattooed, beneath the armpit, with the *SS* insignia. But there were thousands of *SS* men, and the Allied armies had other problems. And so, many of them had skin grafts to remove the tattoo.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But if the position of the ordinary *SS* man was dangerous, consider von Hertig's situation. He was the infamous leader of a special detachment, one especially wanted by those who wished to avenge their dead comrades. And in the foolish vainglory of his early successes, von Hertig had put his tattoo plainly in sight on his forearm, just above the wrist, where it could easily betray him. It seemed hopeless, but von Hertig was a clever man. He did not hide his tattoo, he used it. You are familiar with the stylized lightning-*S* of that group —" The major dipped his finger in the coffee and traced out the design on the table top:

By extending upward the lowest stroke of each lightning-*S*, he created a quite serviceable double 4:

"Then he had other numbers tattooed before and behind it, and so converted himself, or at least his arm. from killer to victim. He had the files of a whole camp at his disposal, and so it was simple for him to choose a new identity, to leave the country, to come here. He was treated very well in the death camp, the man with diabetes, for it was *his* camp.

"But all this time he was being hunted down by a man for whom we should truly feel pity, one of the nameless survivors of the camp, a man who had removed an ugly shameful number from his arm by means of a skin graft. This second man hunted him down, broke into his house, and then, to make sure, broke open the wall-safe, found von Hertig's papers and *SS* cigarette case, and then executed a criminal. After that he did not care. He was easily captured by servants, who summoned doctor and police. For the doctor it was a simple affair, but for the policeman — the wolf — less so.

"Let me tell you something about this policeman. He was not a good man, like you — nor an evil man, like his general. He was something of both, a man who ran with the hares and hunted with the hounds. A man who pitied the oppressed, but served the oppressor. And he came upon a scene as topsy-turvy as his own mind. Here was a fat, innocuous little man dead, but this innocuous man had once been an infamous killer. And here was a handsome, arrogant man, who looked the way the Nazis pictured themselves in their movies, but who had actually been one of their victims. This man made no secret of his identity. He did not care.

"For the policeman was caught upon the high point of honor, where one must choose right or be damned forever. And a strange, dangerous idea came to him. If the scene looked topsy-turvy, *then turn it right-side up!* Von Hertig had seen to it that no accurate description existed. Then

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

give this man von Hertig's papers and cigarette case; make him von Hertig. How would that help him? Instead of a piece of flotsam who had killed an important man, he would *be* that man. Then what? The policeman would make it appear to his General that the situation was dangerous, that von Hertig must be sped out of the country. He is a man wanted by the United States, but he is a man who still has powerful and unappeasable friends. But the policeman had to act quickly, and not give the General time to think.

"Therefore, an atmosphere of crisis had to be created. Here the policeman used a good man for his purposes, a doctor who had been involved in the case, a moral man, and an American. The doctor could easily have been kept in the dark, but instead, the policeman tactlessly made him privy to the whole affair, told him so much that if the false von Hertig were not flown out of the country, he would be in Allied hands within 48 hours. And so the General, a frightened man who feared von Hertig's friends, had him flown out.

"The doctor, with the monumental obtuseness of the innocent, swallowed it all. Prisoners learn to walk in short, angular steps, but to the good doctor this is Nazi arrogance. Prisoners learn to destroy traces of their cigarettes, but to the good doctor this is the sign of a veteran soldier. Prisoners in death camps sometimes have bad things happen to their legs, but to Doctor Corton this is the mark of battle. Prisoners of death camps often feel extreme revulsion toward their captors, so when this one says 'pig' to the evil body he has killed, the good doctor, not knowing the truth, is properly revolted.

"And so the doctor played his part to the hilt, as he never could have played it if he had been coached. And as for the policeman — the wolf — did he act upon the high point of honor? He does not know. He did what he thought had to be done."

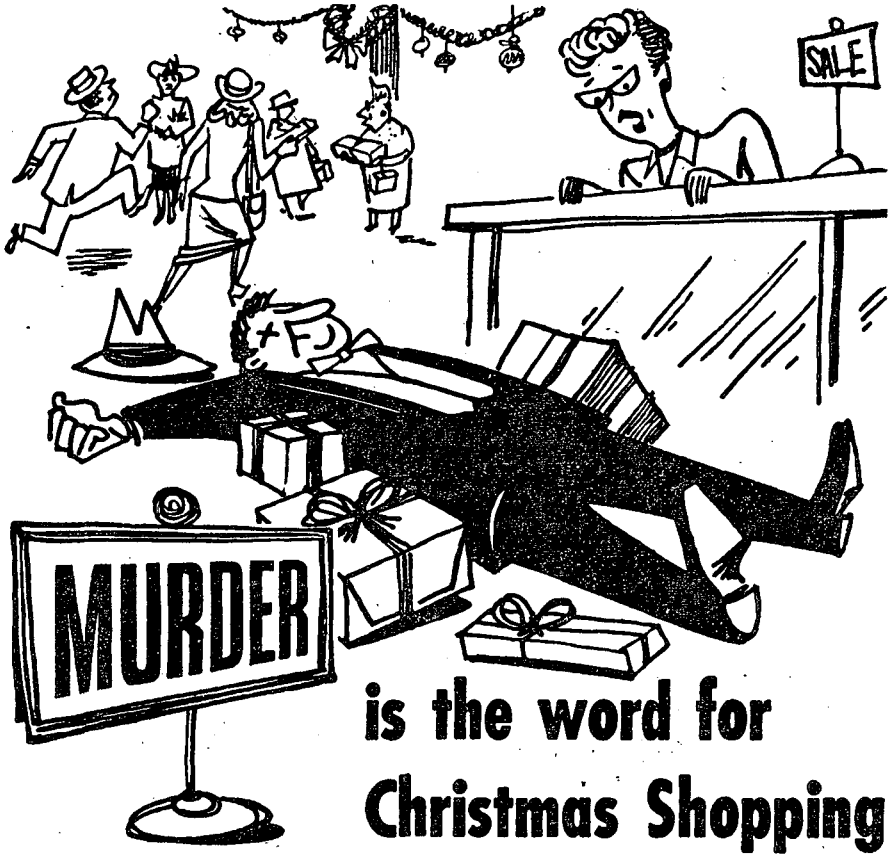
The plane was ready to take off now, and the guards opened the office door. The prisoner walked out between them, handsome and indifferent. He looked over unsmilingly at Corton and Tennente. "But all this," Tennente said to Corton, "is but a traveler's tale, to while away the time in an airport." They walked across to the prisoner then, and Tennente, drawing himself up, saluted him. "You are a very brave man, Colonel," he said. Then he nodded to the guards.

The policeman and the doctor watched the plane take off, slowly circle the field, and then point straight out to the sea which lay beyond the mountains. Tennente walked slowly and painfully to the waiting car, and Corton walked with him, adjusting his pace to that of the crippled man. They walked through the open door, passing unnoticingly beneath the General's blank, inhuman face, and entered the car which would take them back to the armed, empty city. . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ARLEN, MICHAEL: The Bearded Golfer . . Oct. 20
ARMSTRONG, ANTHONY: One-Way Street . . . . . Nov. 117
ARMSTRONG, CHARLOTTE: The Evening Hour . . . . . Aug. 65
ARTHUR, ROBERT: Hard Case . . . . . Sept. 121
BEESTON, L. J.: The Human Leopards . Sept. 111
BENTLEY, E. C.: The Sweet Shot . . . . July 44
BENTLEY, PHYLLIS: Author in Search of a Character . . . . . Dec. 3
BIGGERS, EARL DERR: The Ebony Stick . . . . . Nov. 81
BRADFORD, ROARK: The Sheriff Decides . . . . . Dec. 65
BROOKE, MAXEY: Morte d'Alain . . . . Dec. 74
CAIN, JAMES M.: Dead Man . . . . . Oct. 128
CANNING, VICTOR: A Matter of Timing . . . . . Dec. 50
CARR, A. H. Z.: Hit and Run . . . . . July 21
Tyger! Tyger! . . . . . Oct. 3
CHILD, CHARLES B.: Death Had a Voice . . . . . Sept. 54
The Inspector Had a Wife . . . . . Dec. 55
COHEN, OCTAVUS ROY: Always Trust a Cop . . . . . Aug. 41
COXE, GEORGE HARMON: Going My Way? . . . . . Dec. 22
DAVIS, DOROTHY SALISBURY: Spring Fever . . . . . Nov. 3
DEFORD, MIRIAM ALLEN: De Crimine Oct. 115
DEMING, RICHARD: For Value Received . . . . . Aug. 81
DENT, LESTER: V Marks the Spot . . . Nov. 41
ELLIN, STANLEY: The Best of Everything . . . . . Sept. 3
FLANAGAN, THOMAS: The Point of Honor . . . . . Dec. 129
FLETCHER, J. S.: Mr. Mann of London July 54
FLORA, FLETCHER: Torrid Zone . . . . . Oct. 137
GARDNER, ERLE STANLEY: In Round Figures . . . . . July 81
GILBERT, ANTHONY: Over My Dead Body . . . . . July 61
GILBERT, MICHAEL: Mrs. Oliphant Deceased . . . . . Dec. 68
GODFREY, PETER: And Turn the Hour Sept. 98
The Fifth Dimension . . . . . Nov. 105
GRUBER, FRANK: The Dragoon Pistol . Aug. 114
HALDANE, J. B. S.: The Gold-Makers . Oct. 29
HATCH, TALBOT C.: Guess Who? . . . . Nov. 125
HOLDING, ELISABETH SANXAY: Farewell, Big Sister . . . . . July 72
HOOD, MARGARET PAGE: The Green Weed . . . . . Sept. 30
HUXLEY, ALDOUS: The Portrait . . . . . Sept. 134
JEPSON, SELWYN: Letter of the Law . . July 26
KANTOR, MACKINLAY: Man Who Voted for Ulysses S. Grant . . . . . Dec. 12
KING, RUFUS: The Y-Shaped Scar . . . Sept. 17
KIRK, LAURENCE: Two of a Kind . . . . Oct. 81
KYNE, PETER B.: Memory Test . . . . . Nov. 32
MARTYN, WYNDHAM: The Abstractor . July 65
MAUGHAM, W. SOMERSET: The Creative Impulse . . . . . Dec. 101
MCCLURE, JANE: Dark Interlude . . . . Sept. 126
MILNE, A. A.: A Perfectly Ordinary Case of Blackmail . . . . . Nov. 21
NESBIT, EDITH: In the Dark . . . . . Sept. 43
NORTON, HENRY: How Jacques Spent His Wedding Night . . . . . Sept. 69
PALMER, STUART: The Jinx Man . . . . Dec. 81
PANGBORN, EDGAR: The Singing Stick Aug. 3
PATRICK, Q.: The Pigeon Woman . . . . July 114
Death on the Riviera . . . . . Sept. 65
PENTECOST, HUGH: Lonely Boy . . . . . Aug. 132
PERELMAN, S. J.: Nesselrode to Jeopardy . . . . . Oct. 44
PEROWNE, BARRY: Knowing What I Know Now . . . . . Nov. 127
QUEEN, ELLERY: Money Talks . . . . . Aug. 104
RICE, CRAIG: And the Birds Still Sing . Dec. 33
ROSS, S. R.: You Got to Have Luck . Oct. 91
SIMENON, GEORGES: The Old Lady of Bayeux . . . . . Aug. 20
STEINBECK, JOHN: The Poor Pirate . . . July 33
STRONG, L. A. G.: You Can't Love Two Woman . . . . . Aug. 55
SYMONS, JULIAN: The Case of XX-2 . . Aug. 108
Cat and Mouse . . . . . Nov. 74
TRAIN, ARTHUR: Monsieur Donaque . July 3
TWAIN, MARK: Tom Sawyer, Detective—Part One . . . . . Aug. 90
Tom Sawyer, Detective — Part Two . . . . . Sept. 81
Tom Sawyer, Detective — Conclusion . . . . . Oct. 65
VANDERCOOK, JOHN W.: The Challenge . . . . . July 128
VAN DOREN, MARK: An Episode at the Honeypot . . . . . Aug. 127
VETTERLEIN, BARBARA: Dear Departed Harold . . . . . Nov. 68
VICKERS, ROY: The Twelve-Minute Grave . . . . . Oct. 98
WALSH, THOMAS: Stranger in the Park . . . . . Oct. 52
WEBER, RALPH NORMAN: The Head in the Barrel . . . . . Nov. 102

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



is the word for Christmas Shopping

...but Ellery Queen makes it a pleasure!

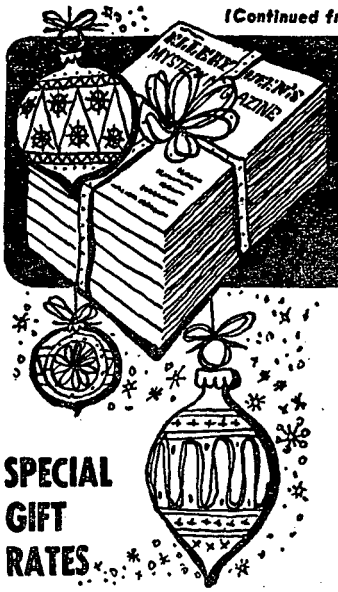
Here's a mystery you can solve in just four words: *What Christmas gift lives long, costs little, pleases greatly, and can be bought from the comfort of your easy chair?* Of course you know the answer — a gift subscription to ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE!

When you give EQMM you give the best stories of the world's most famous crime authors — John Dickson Carr, Agatha Christie, Erle Stanley Gardner, Charlotte Armstrong, and many, many others. You give tomorrow's masters, too — the "discoveries" that enable EQMM readers to be the first to enjoy new 'tec talents. And you give the little-known mystery masterpieces of those who have won fame in other writing fields — such authors as 1949 Nobel Prize-winner William Faulkner, W. Somerset Maugham, Sinclair Lewis, James Hilton, and Ernest Hemingway. Yes, you give a great deal — yet pay little — when you give EQMM for Christmas.

TURN PAGE FOR SPECIAL XMAS GIFT RATES

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Continued from preceding page)



Here's My Christmas Gift To You . . .

— ELLERY QUEEN

SPECIAL GIFT RATES

At this time of the year only, you may buy ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE at these special Christmas Gift Rates: $4 for the first subscription, and $3 for each additional subscription. You save $1 on each gift after the first! And by entering or renewing your own subscription now, you save $1 on that one, too.

Send EQMM to everyone who enjoys a good mystery story — and don't forget to treat yourself! Mail the Gift Order Form *today,* so that our handsome gift card bearing your name may be sure to reach each recipient before Christmas.

One Subscription — $4.00 Two Subscriptions — $7.00 Each Additional Subscription — $3.00

CHRISTMAS GIFT ORDER FORM

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

Please send a year's subscription as my gift to each of the following:

Name.....
Address.....
City, Zone, State.....
Gift Card: From.....

Name.....
Address.....
City, Zone, State.....
Gift Card: From.....

Name.....
Address.....
City, Zone, State.....
Gift Card: From.....

Name.....
Address.....
City, Zone, State.....
Gift Card: From.....

Your own subscription may be included at the special gift rates. Please check below.

ALSO ENTER MY OWN SUBSCRIPTION— ☐ New ☐ Renewal ☐ Do Not

Donor's Name.....

Address.....

City.....Zone.....State.....

☐ I Enclose $..... ☐ Bill me. Q-D-2

Special Gift Rates One Subscription—$4.00 Two Subscriptions—$7.00 Each Additional Subscription—$3.00

No additional postage for U. S. possessions, or countries in the Pan American Union; other foreign subscriptions $1.00 additional per year. No charge for mailing to service men overseas.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Continued from Back Cover

Yes! ALL SIX OF THESE GARDNER MYSTERIES ARE YOURS FREE

YES, it's true! ALL SIX of these thrill-packed Erle Stanley Gardner mystery books are yours FREE on this amazing offer. Just ONE Gardner book is jammed with suspense, mystery, and lightning-fast action—so imagine the "kick" you will get out of SIX books by the world's biggest selling mystery writer! Each is a *full size, full length* book, absolutely complete. A $15.00 value—but yours FREE on this sensational offer.

Why do we make such a liberal offer? Simply to introduce you to the many advantages of membership in the famous Detective Book Club—the only Club that brings you the very latest NEW mysteries *at one-third the usual cost!*

The Cream of the Best NEW Mysteries

Out of the 300 or more new detective books that come out every year, the Club selects the very "cream of the crop"—by top-notch authors like Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, Manning Coles, Mignon Eberhart, Anthony Gilbert, John Dickson Carr, and Leslie Ford. All THESE, and many *other* famous writers have had their books selected by the Club. Many of them are members of the Club themselves!

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get THREE of them *complete* in one handsome volume (a $6.00 to $7.50 value) for only $1.89. So you actually get THREE new mysteries FOR LESS THAN THE PRICE YOU WOULD USUALLY PAY FOR ONE!

You Take ONLY The Books You Want

You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview," which will fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume in advance. You need NOT take any specific number of books—only the ones you want. NO money in advance; NO membership fees. You may cancel membership any time you please.

You Enjoy These Five Advantages

(1) You get the cream of the finest BRAND-NEW detective books—by the best authors. (2) You save TWO-THIRDS the usual cost. (3) You take ONLY the books you want. (4) The volumes are fresh and clean—delivered right to your door. (5) They are so well printed and bound that they grow into a library you'll be proud to own.

Mail Card for 6 FREE Books

SEND NO MONEY. Simply mail postcard promptly, and we will send you at once—FREE—the six complete new Gardner mystery thrillers described above, together with the current triple-volume containing three other complete new detective books. But this exceptional offer may never be repeated. Mail postcard at one to:

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
One Park Ave., New York 16, N. Y.

MAIL THIS POSTCARD AT ONCE

●

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

ALL SIX BOOKS FREE } **SEND NO MONEY—JUST MAIL POSTCARD** 35

Walter J. Black, President **UM**
DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
One Park Avenue, New York 16, N. Y.

Please enroll me as a member and send me FREE, in regular publisher's editions, the SIX new full-length Gardner mystery novels pictured on this page. In addition send me the current triple-volume of the month, which contains three complete detective books.

I am not obligated to take any specific number of volumes. I am to receive an advance description of all forthcoming selections and I may reject any book before or after I receive it. I may cancel membership whenever I wish.

I need send no money now, but for each volume I decide to keep I will send you only $1.89 plus a few cents mailing charges as complete payment within one week after I receive it. *(Books shipped in U.S.A. only.)*

Mr. }
Mrs. } .....
Miss } (PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY)

Address.....

City..... Zone No. (if any) State.....

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Free-6 To New Members

Smash-Hit Mysteries

all by the one and only

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

"Undisputed King of Mystery Writers"

All Full Size, Full Length Books • Retail Value $15.00

HERE'S an amazing "get-acquainted" offer to new members of the Detective Book Club! SIX top-notch detective thrillers by the famous ERLE STANLEY GARDNER — yours FREE! FULL-SIZE, FULL-LENGTH books, worth $15.00 at retail—yours FREE—*at once*—as a membership gift!

1 THE CLUE OF THE RUNAWAY BLONDE

A CORPSE is found in a field — a knife wound gaping from the back. But there are no footprints!

The D.A. is "gunning for" sheriff Bill Eldon. But the wily sheriff floors him—*and the killer!*

2 TOP OF THE HEAP

Donald Lam, private eye, gets tangled up with a gambler, a burlesque queen, two lively girls—*and a DEAD one.* It baffles police—especially when a *second* corpse turns up! (Written under pen name of A. A. Fair.)

3 THE CASE OF THE ONE-EYED WITNESS

When Mason picked up the phone a mysterious voice said: "See Medford Carlin tonight. Tell him to get another partner. *Matter of life and death!*" But Carlin had never HAD a partner! Yet Carlin is MURDERED!

4 THE CASE OF THE ANGRY MOURNER

A witness *swears* he saw Belle (Mason's client) at the scene of the murder. Exhibit "A" is Belle's compact —with the mirror fragments found near the corpse. And the *murder* weapon is Belle's *gun!*

5 THE CASE OF THE FIERY FINGERS

Perry's client is on trial for murder. The D.A. flings a package in front of the accused woman. She screams and collapses. The jury is ready to send her to the chair—but Perry comes up with a surprise package of his own!

6 THE CASE OF THE NEGLIGENT NYMPH

Mason sees a girl swimming near Alder's estate. He hauls her into his boat. She hands him a letter. "Alder will do *anything* to get this back!" she says. "You *must* stop him!" *Then someone kills Alder!*

—*Continued on inside cover*

FIRST CLASS
PERMIT No. 7
(Sec. 34.9, P. L. & R.)
New York, N. Y.

BUSINESS REPLY CARD
No Postage Stamp Necessary if Mailed in the United States

4¢ POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
ONE PARK AVENUE
NEW YORK 16, N. Y.

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR SIX FREE BOOKS

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED